

Chapter 1: The Forgotten Charm

Lily Potter had a slight smile on her face as she walked into the living room. Her husband of nearly three years was there, playing with their eight month old son, Harry. She wasn't sure how her husband James would respond, but watching James play "racing broom" with Harry, she couldn't help but grow excited and giddy at the prospect of sharing her news with him. Parenthood really became the two of them!

When James finally took a break from flying their son around the room in his arms, he noticed her presence. His smile instantly increased the way it always did when he was smiling at her. Lily loved her husband deeply and knew he would always love her. She just wasn't sure how he would react to another change in their lives. They hadn't planned on having any more additions to their family at the present time; it just wasn't safe with Voldemort targeting families like them, who were dedicated to the light.

"Lily-love," James said with joy in his voice. "It appears that our strapping young son Harry is a natural flyer."

"James," Lily admonished. "He's only eight months! You shouldn't be placing him on your forearm imitating flying on a broom."

"But Lily-love," James whined. "Harry loves playing racing broom with Daddy. Just look at him."

James was right. Their son Harry was delirious with joy over playing "racing boom" with his Daddy. Lily knew that if she gave James an inch, he would try to take a mile. They may be just playing "racing broom" today but it was very likely James would try taking Harry with him on a real broom tomorrow.

Schooling her face to hide her smile, Lily countered her husband's claims. "And when Harry gets motion sickness from all this running around, you'll be willing to clean it up and calm him down all on your own?"

Lily was sorely tempted to break down laughing at the ashen look that covered her husband's face. One thing James never liked to do was clean up the messy parts of being a parent.

"Maybe your right, Lils," James conceded. "Perhaps I should wait till Harry is a little older before playing that game with him again."

Lily truly loved that her husband ended up agreeing with her side of an argument most of the time. While one side of her was content to simply join her husband and son as they continued to play, she was ready to burst with excitement over her news. Lily just couldn't believe how blessed her family was.

"James," began Lily, the excitement ringing through her voice. "I've got some interesting news for you."

James looked up from where he was now stacking blocks with Harry on the floor. "What's the news dear? Is Padfoot dropping by for dinner?"

While she loved her husband there was more than a few times that she just wanted to smack him upside the head.

"Really, James," huffed Lily, "Padfoot coming over for dinner is not exciting news."

When James cracked her a smile, Lily realized he was just making fun with her.

"Lily-love, what's your interesting news?"

A sly smile crossed Lily's face, "James, darling, remember that night we had Padfoot and Mooney watch little Harry for us?"

"Of course," a wide goofy smile was across James face.

"Well, remember what we did while we were child-free for a few hours."

The intense look that crossed James's face at the barest mentions of what they did made Lily's blood boil.

"Yes," James eventually choked out. It was quite obvious to her that he was scheming somehow to convince his Marauder friends to watch their son for them again for a few hours. So James could steal her away somewhere private and child-free.

"Do you know what we forgot?" Lily decided to let burst his planning session before it got too far off the ground. The puzzled look on James's face told her he had no clue as to what she realized the next day.

"No, Lils, I haven't the foggiest idea."

"It was a certain charm," hinted Lily, attempting to let her husband piece it all together. Unfortunately for her, he seemed rather clueless as he racked his brain to figure out what she was trying to tell him.

Sighing, Lily determined she would need to use the blunt direct approach if she ever hoped to tell him during the first trimester.

"The contraceptive charm," Lily blurted out.

Lily didn't possibly believe her husband's smile could get any larger than it currently was. After the initial shock wore off, James jumped off the floor, knocking over Harry's tower, grabbed her arms, and started swinging her around the room. If anything, James appeared to be giddier than she was about the news.

When he was through swinging her around the room, he pulled her tightly to him and kissed her soundly. After an eternity they broke apart, both slightly panting. Lily loved this man more than anything, and she was thrilled to be carrying his second child.

A thoughtful look crossed James face, and Lily couldn't help but wonder what placed it there. Yet she need not ask James what he was concerned with when she heard him mutter.

“Now how am I to convince Padfoot and Mooney to watch Harry again after what he put them through the last time?” Turning towards Lily, James winked before saying, “we need to properly celebrate the good news.”

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The changes that occurred for the Potter family over the past several months still had James’s head spinning. It did not seem like five months had passed since Lily told him they forgot the charm. He still snickered at the memory. James may never know why his wife just didn’t tell him they were expecting. Though he supposed making him figure things out for himself seemed to be one of Lily’s favorite things to do.

Shortly after that wonderful piece of news, their world began crashing in all around them. First they had to endure his parents murdered by the hands of Death Eaters. Then less than three weeks later Lily’s parents died in a car crash caused by drunk driver. The loss of both sets of their parents was extremely hard on them. As an only child, his entire world before Hogwarts had centered on his mum and dad. Now, they were gone, never to be with him again.

The loss of their parents made the next tragedy harder for James and Lily to take. One night Professor Dumbledore asked James and Lily to wait to speak with him after an Order meeting. While it was not unusual for the Headmaster to ask to speak with various members after a meeting, a feeling of dread came over him.

Once the room cleared out, James realized he and Lily were not the only couple to stay behind. Frank and Alice Longbottom were also asked to stay. The feeling of dread became more pronounced. James didn’t know why, but he just knew nothing would ever be the same after this meeting.

When Dumbledore explained to both couples about the prophecy concerning one of the children, James instantly knew it was his son. Potters had always been staunch supporters of the light it was their family way, the family destiny. His son, his Harry, was going to be the one to defeat Voldemort, or die trying.

Knowing now the pain of losing his parent, he never wanted to experience the pain of losing his child. If Voldemort was going to try to kill his son, he was going to have to get through both him and Lily first. Whatever it took, they would protect their son at all cost.

This is why James's world was slipping out of his control. The Potter family had been moving from safe house to safe house with no clear place to hide. Every time they settled in a new location, they would be ambushed by Voldemort and his Death Eaters. They had nowhere safe to go.

Now they were faced with a horrible realization. Due to the increasing number of times that the Death Eaters had found their location, it became apparent that they were being betrayed by a member of the Order. The Longbottoms had yet to be discovered in their first hiding location, while his family was currently hiding in the sixth safe house.

The previous evening, Dumbledore shared with James his belief that it was a member of the Order, particularly close to the Potter family who was giving away their hiding location. James could not accept this belief. The only Order members that he and Lily were close to, was the Marauders. His brothers would never sell his wife and children out to Voldemort.

Yet, someone was telling Voldemort where to find them. It was all so confusing, it was just too much to take in and process. There was only one thing left for James to do. He needed to talk things over with his wife.

James never pretended that he saw himself as the supreme head of his household. He always knew his wife was more than capable of taking care of herself, as well as taking charge in situations. The simple fact was that Lily was a natural leader, who also happened to be very intelligent. No matter what was to be, they would come to the decision together.

Walking around the small living area of the safe house, it wasn't too difficult to run into Lily. He found her coloring with Harry at the kitchen table. Their son, while still very young, was quite the artist. At least

that was what Lily claimed. Truthfully, Harry was very skilled at making different colored shapes and lines.

Detesting himself for doing so, James needed to breakup this happy time to have a serious conversation with his wife.

“Having fun, Lils?”

Lily’s smile could light the room. “Of course, love. Harry and I were making some lovely new artwork for Daddy.”

James hesitated; this was not a conversation he ever wanted to have with his wife. “Lily, there is something we really need to talk about.”

Her smile slipped. “What’s wrong?” was Lily’s simple question.

Taking a deep breath James related his recent conversation with Dumbledore to his wife. When he stated that it was someone close to them sharing their location to Voldemort, Lily began shaking her head in protest.

“He has to be wrong.” Lily said with conviction. “Our friends would never do this to us. Not Sirius, Remus and Peter!”

“But Lily,” James began. “They were the only ones who knew our location each time. No one else knew all five times where we were hiding.”

“James,” Lily admonished. “Several members of the Order knew of our location.”

But James knew he had to tell Lily why Dumbledore suspected a Marauder.

“While Order members knew where we were Lily, it was different Order members at different locations. Sometimes they repeated, but for the most part they were different.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lily asked an edge to her tone of voice.

"The only people who knew our hiding places all five times were Dumbledore, Mad-Eye, Sirius, Remus and Peter. Do you believe that Dumbledore or Mad-Eye is the leak?" James hated putting it to Lily like that but he couldn't think of any other way to make her see reason.

But Lily wouldn't accept it. "What if Dumbledore told someone else? We have no clue as to who else he would confide in. We both know he trusts Hagrid completely but the man can't keep a secret. What if..."

But Lily's rant died on her lips. Merlin, James loved his wife's intelligence, but watching it at work was rather scary.

"There's more that you haven't told me, isn't there?" Lily asked, her voice was barely a whisper.

"Dumbledore has a theory." James didn't know if he wanted to tell her more. "Voldemort is recruiting werewolves and it is possible..."

"No," Lily cried interrupting his recount, Harry began to cry at this mother's distressed tone. "There is no way Remus is capable of doing anything like that, so get it out of your mind, James." Lily picked Harry up and held him to her chest, rocking him gently.

"I know it sounds wrong Lily, but it is a real possibility." James sighed before continuing. "I do not want Dumbledore's theory to be correct. But there is no other explanation I can think of."

Lily didn't immediately respond. Her face reflected her internal compilation.

"It's only us." Lily's voice was little more than a whisper. "Why hasn't Voldemort found the Longbottoms? All of our friends know where they are hiding, and if they are the traitor they could give them the Longbottoms' location as well."

At once the realization hit James. Voldemort was most likely only looking for their son. Lily had tears in her eyes as she stared at their

Harry. This wasn't right, this wasn't fair. It was one thing to think your child would be the one to stop the Dark Lord. It was another thing to see the evidence, plan as day, pointing you to that conclusion.

"James, what should we do?" Lily's voice quivered as she spoke.

James took off his glasses to rub his eyes. What could they do? Should they trust the Headmaster's judgment, or go their own way?

"I think," James finally concluded, "that we follow the Headmaster's advice for the time being. At least until we know more."

"What about the baby?"

James shuddered. They still had not told anyone of Lily's pregnancy. At first they were keeping it to themselves, and then there just was never the right time to bring it up.

"I think it should stay between us for now." James stated slowly and deliberately, "at least until we have a better idea about what is going on."

Lily nodded her head; the tears were still fresh in her eyes. James was powerless to do anything other than just hope they were doing the right thing for their family.

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One of the smallest rooms in the muggle hospital was designed for its smallest patients to reside in. This was where Lily Potter found herself trying to control her anger and rage. Lily couldn't stop raging against how unfair life was for her tiny daughter who had only just been born.

On October 10th, 1981 Lily and James Potter welcomed their daughter Alexa Lily Potter to the world. It should have been a happy occasion for the family, yet it wasn't. Their daughter had been born seven weeks early, and was fighting for her tiny life.

Tears had been freely flowing down Lily's face for several days now, ever since their daughter had been rushed away from them to save her life. Little Lexi should have the best magic money could buy working on her to save her life, not these muggle techniques.

While Lily was muggleborn, and understood the muggle way of life more than the average witch. She also knew that magic was far more affective in situations such as the one she found her daughter in. But they couldn't go to St. Mungo's. They had to rely on the muggle means to keep Lexi into this world.

Voldemort was actively looking for them. The day after Lexi was born James was forced to hide the family under the Fidelius charm, to keep Harry safe. If Lexi were born in a magical setting, it would only be too easy for spies of Voldemort to find her and expose the rest of the family.

As Lily continued to silently cry, the door to the hospital room opened and a man slipped in. The only reason Lily was aware of this was she heard the silent spell he cast.

"Where is Harry?" Lily asked the concern evident in her voice, yet she never turned away from her daughter.

"Sirius came over to watch him." Her husband answered as he wrapped his arms around her shoulders.

Lily was about to protest, but James stopped her with a simple glance.

"You need to come home, love. Harry and I miss you. All Harry has been doing for the past two days is wander around the house looking for 'mum'. Please come home for just a little while." The pleading tone in James's voice was heart breaking.

"I can't leave her here alone." Lily whispered so low James barely heard her.

"Lily-love, there is nothing we can do now but pray." The anguish was evident in James's voice. "Lexi is in good hands here. You could

come home for a few hours and see Harry. Perhaps you could even get some rest.”

“No,” Lily began, “she can’t be here alone. Lexi needs her family with her.”

“Yes,” agreed James. “Lexi needs her family. But she also needs her family to be well. You need to rest, Lils. Sirius and I can take turns being here with her. That way you can get some rest.”

Lily began to sob again. This situation was just heart breaking to her. She never thought her daughter would be born prematurely. The fact that the doctors had no idea why this would happen made Lily believe it was because she was a bad mother. She was so concerned with Harry; she neglected the child she carried in her womb. Now that little girl was fighting for her life.

“This is all my fault.” Lily began. James made to interrupt her, but Lily would not let him. “James, it is! I neglected her! I need to be here with her. I need to protect her. I’ve been a terrible mother to her!”

Lily hadn’t even realized she had been yelling. But Lexi’s little cries stopped Lily’s rant immediately. Lily was torn; she wanted to hold her daughter to comfort her but Lily could barely touch her due to all the tubes connected to her.

Instead of doing what came natural to her, Lily began to sing to Lexi. The song Lily sang was a simple muggle nursery song she would sing to Harry to calm him down. Stroking her daughter’s arm and singing was the only way she knew how to ease her daughter’s wailing.

“Lily-love,” James began when Lexi once again fell asleep. “You are a wonderful mother. There are some things that are simply out of our control.”

The tears however, were once again flowing freely. Lily understood what James was telling her but it was almost as though her mind couldn’t process the meaning of it all.

James came and stood behind Lily, wrapping his arms around her waist as he rested his chin on top of her head. After standing together in silence for a few moments, James once again spoke.

“Lexi is a Potter, and Potters are fighters. I believe in my soul she will overcome this just as she will overcome every obstacle that she will have to face in her life.”

“I’m just so worried, James.”

“As are we all,” James replied in a defeated tone. “But hasn’t the doctor stated that Lexi is making excellent improvement?”

Lily could only nod her head in agreement. Lily knew how hard these past few months had been on her family. She also knew that James didn’t have a very positive outlook on the prospects that they were all going to live through this. Seeing their daughter like this must be eating him up inside as well.

“We should tell Dumbledore.” Lily said not for the first time.

“No,” James immediately disagreed. “We can’t Lils. The only people in the wizarding world that know of Lexi are us and Sirius. That’s the way it’s got to be. If we tell Dumbledore then it is likely that he will share that information with someone he ‘trusts’. People that Dumbledore trusts may not have our best interest in mind.”

“You’re just angry that he has begun to trust Severus.” Lily countered her husband’s opinion.

“Snape will never change, Lils. Dumbledore may trust him, but he will never actively do something solely because it is the best interest of a Potter.” James displaced himself from Lily and began pacing around the little room.

“Just think if Dumbledore told Snape about Lexi. What if he needed to tell Voldemort something to get him to trust his information from Dumbledore?” James waited a few moments to let the thought sink in before he continued. “Snape would sell us out to Voldemort to save

his own skin. Then Voldemort would begin raiding muggle hospitals for evidence of us being there. He would find Lexi!”

Lily hated it when James was right like that, but as much as she wanted to she could not find fault in his logic. While Lexi was in the hospital, they could not tell anyone else. But that did remind her that she needed to discuss a certain decision he made on his own without her consent or approval.

“Earlier today a nurse asked me a question about some of the paper work you filled out with the hospital when I was admitted.”

“Oh, really?” James tried to sound confused but he was not meeting her eyes. A classic sign that he knew he was guilty of something.

“Yes, it appears that you did not know the telephone number of my sister when you listed her as Lexi’s next of kin.” Lily attempted to stare her husband down, but it was proving quite difficult when he was looking at everything but her.

“Well, um, yeah...” James sounded hopelessly guilty.

“Why is my sister listed as our next of kin?” Pausing only momentarily Lily rephrased her question, “actually, why do you think we need to list a next of kin?”

“Voldemort,” was all James said staring Lily finally in the eyes.

“But why Petunia,” Lily asked not quite getting her mind around her husband’s motives.

“If something were to happen to us, Sirius would take custody of both of our children.” James began to explain. “It’s not like there is a way the hospital could contact him, if something had indeed happened to us. The two of us decided that if the worst were to happen and we were to die, he could take Lexi from Petunia.”

Lily contemplated this for a moment before deciding their idea did have merit. It’s not like Sirius owned a muggle telephone or anything.

"Okay, I agree." Lily couldn't help but giggle at the stunned expression on James face. "But why didn't you just tell me this?"

"I know you hate bringing you sister into magical affairs." James said the reluctance evident in his mannerism. "But, we figured it was safe since this was just a worst case scenario. There is no reason to suspect that anything may happen."

"Is this part of the reason why you and Sirius wanted us to use Peter as the secret keeper?" Lily asked against her better judgment. Nothing good ever came from trying to understand something her husband and Sirius schemed of.

"Yes, that's part of it," James reluctantly admitted. "We figure Peter is the least likely person to be a spy since he's so twitchy. It's not like he could actually be sneaky enough to pull it off without giving himself up. We thought it was best not to use Sirius since it was so obvious, and if he was captured and tortured for the information on where to find us, well then he'd likely have the same fate as the rest of us."

"You really thought this through well." Lily commented, trying to keep the awe out of her tone. Who knew the Marauder scheming nature was actually good for something?

"You've been so worried, Lils," James stated as though it explained everything, which really it did.

"You've done well, James." Lily said her pride reflected in her voice. "I just wish that Remus was the secret keeper instead of Peter."

A dark look crossed James face. "You know what Dumbledore suspects."

"I know," Lily admitted. "But, I think Dumbledore is wrong. I'd just feel safer if it were him instead of Peter."

"I hope Dumbledore is wrong too." James readily agreed. "However, just in case he is right Sirius and I thought Peter was the best choice. I won't risk my family on my personal hopes about my friends."

"I know James. You're just wonderful like that." Lily lightly teased her husband before kissing him on the cheek.

"I'm glad you're acting more like yourself." James said before kissing her hard on the mouth.

Even though James claimed she was beginning to act like herself, she knew James wasn't acting like his self. He hadn't acted like himself since they learned of the prophecy. His normal positive outlook on life had shifted to a pessimistic approach. It almost seemed like he was planning for their deaths. An ominous feeling always passed through Lily when she thought about the future as well.

The fact that James had planned on how Sirius would retrieve Lexi if, Merlin forbid, anything happened to them was clear evidence of that. It almost made her wish she had a way to contribute to the protection of her children in the same manner. Suddenly the idea hit her with the force of the Hogwarts Express.

Pulling away from her husband's embrace Lily walked over to her sleeping daughter, pulling her wand out of her sleeve, Lily pointed it at Lexi. James quietly watched from afar, the expression on his face was unreadable, yet he did not make to stop her.

"Alexa, may you draw from the strength of your family," Lily began, the words simply flowing through her like magic. "May your brother, Harry have the strength and ability to protect you from harm. May you likewise be able to help protect him from those who wish to undo him. May love always protect you both from the will of hatred. So I speak, so I intend, so let it be done!"

With Lily's final word, a golden aura surrounded the small child in the hospital crib, at the same time one also appeared around her brother over a hundred miles away much to his godfather's surprise. Lily's spell had taken hold on her children.

"What have I done?" Lily whispered when the aura finally dissipated from around her child.

James walked over and pulled her tightly to him. "You gave her a wonderful gift. I have no idea what that gift necessarily was, but it had to be good due to that beautiful aura."

Lily nodded weakly, suddenly she felt exhausted. Before she could vocalize her tiredness, James began kissing her with intense passion.

When they broke apart, James continued. "Do you think you can go home and rest for a little while?"

Hesitantly, Lily agreed. James was just worried about her after all, and now she suddenly felt more at peace than she had for the past several months. Tired and at peace, was a lot better than restless and worried.

"Good," James said with a large smile on his face. "I'll stay here with Lexi and you go rest with our darling Harry."

Lily couldn't stop the groan from escaping her lips. "Do I want to know what our darling son has been getting up to while Mum isn't home?"

The smile on James face was infectious. "Nope, leave it to be a surprise."

After sharing a last kiss goodbye, Lily walked out of the small hospital room for the first time in days. Planning on getting started on a little project James had been nagging her to start for almost a month. With one last look at her husband and daughter Lily wished that perhaps their daughter would be home to celebrate her first Halloween with her big brother in two weeks.

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Petunia Dursley despised her 'perfect' sister Lily. Lily had been the pride and joy of her late parents, God rests their souls. While Lily could never do any wrong in their eyes, Petunia could never seem to do anything right. Yet, Petunia was the one who was alive and well while 'perfect' Lily got herself blown up.

If only their parents could see them now, they would know how imperfect Lily really was. Lily and her deadbeat husband were a shame on their family. They recklessly lost their lives and now she was stuck with their son, who was abandoned on her door step like the rubbish that he was.

Petunia was shaken out of her thoughts with a knock at the door. Hurrying to the door before the knocking woke her son or her freakish nephew, Petunia hastily opened the door. What she saw on the front porch nearly killed her with fright.

A child services representative stood in front of her. How could they possibly know where they kept the freak? He had barely been with them two weeks!

"Mrs. Petunia Dursley?" the man in front of her asked.

"Yes," Petunia replied in a shaky voice.

"I'm Matthew Donaldson with the Surry Child Services Department," the man said while flashing a badge at her. "I'm here in regards to your late sister's child..."

"The boy is currently napping," Petunia cut the man off.

"The boy," Mr. Donaldson said the confusion evident in his voice.

"Yes," Petunia continued stepping out on the porch, "Lily's son Harry."

"Could you excuse me for a second, ma'am?"

With the short nod of Petunia's head, Mr. Donaldson went to his car. He didn't return for nearly ten minutes.

"I'm sorry ma'am. It seems the information regarding the boy, Harry, was not presented to me." The man explained, "I was able to find information about him in the hospital's information, filled out by the late Mr. Potter."

"Hospital information?" Petunia was wary as to where this was going.

“Yes, ma’am. From the registration information regarding the Potters’ daughter, Alexa,” the child services representative continued.

“They had a daughter?” Petunia could only see red. ‘Perfect’ Lily had struck again.

“Yes, ma’am,” the man was looking at Petunia in confusion again. “You must have known that your sister was pregnant again?”

Petunia reeled back; she was drawing too much attention to her family with her actions. She quickly schooled her face in her ‘pleasant and happy’ mask, before she attempted to explain herself.

“Of course I knew my poor sister Lily was expecting!” Petunia was grasping for straws. “I just was unaware the blessed event had occurred, I thought her due date wasn’t till mid-November.”

“Yes, it appears your sister give birth at the beginning of October, several weeks early.” Mr. Donaldson explained, “the hospital staff said your sister rarely left her daughter’s side.”

“Oh darling Lily,” Petunia exclaimed. She knew she was laying it a bit thick but she needed to get rid of this guy quickly before the freak woke up. “She must have been so distraught. I wish she had called me, but she knew my Dudders wasn’t well at the end of September.”

The man was clearly eating up every word she said as though it was gospel now. Lady luck was on Petunia’s side today.

“Is your son better?” the man inquired.

“Yes,” Petunia was glad she could change the conversation to a topic she was comfortable with. “It was just a viral illness but it was his first and it took a lot out of him.”

“Good,” the gentleman exclaimed. “Then you should be able to take custody of your niece as soon as this afternoon.”

Petunia felt like the floor was dropping out from under her. Petunia searched her mind for an excuse or a reason for her to reject her niece's presence from her home. But then that freaky man's letter came to her mind. Was he referring to both the boy and this girl in it? For the first time Petunia regretted burning the letter immediately after she read it.

"Excellent," the words were flying out of her mouth with no control on her part. "When can I expect the dear?"

"A representative from the hospital will stop by later this evening. Due to her premature status there will be some additional care needs for the child." At Petunia's stricken look, the man attempted to ease her fears. "The government will of course cover all of the child's medical expenses, as well as provide funds for the care of both Alexa and Harry." After pausing a moment Mr. Donaldson asked, "How did Harry come to your care?"

"He was with a family friend when my sister and her husband died," Petunia easily lied. "That friend brought Harry over immediately when they learned of the news."

The man was satisfied with this explanation. But he had one more difficult question for Petunia, "May I see Harry now?"

"I'm sorry he's napping right now," Petunia said. "Would it be possible for you to see him at a later date? He has had such a hard time adjusting to the loss of his parents."

"I completely understand," Mr. Donaldson stated. "I'll ring you once I get back to my office so we can discuss when I can visit to see the children, as well as discuss the financial aid your family will receive towards the welfare of the children."

"Naturally," Petunia said, before saying her goodbyes to the man who would become the bane of her existence.

After Mr. Donaldson departed, Petunia entered her home and immediately telephoned her husband. Vernon was going to be furious to learn they were saddled with another freak.

Now that they were stuck with two of her sister's brats, at least they were going to be monetarily compensated for it.

A/N: Hello, welcome to my first full fic: The Strength of Family. I must thank my wonderful beta and dear friend zephy for her amazing help and guidance. I would be lost without her! Please let me know what you think, I'd love to hear your comments and reviews.

Coming in two weeks- Chapter 2: Life with the Dursleys.

Chapter 2: Life with the Dursleys

A small boy and a smaller girl were huddled together on a tiny mattress in a cupboard under the stairs of Number Four Privet Drive. They were young yet they both knew they were very different from everyone else. Their aunt and uncle had told them so.

It was the last day of July and the whole of the country was dealing with sweltering heat, yet the two children held on tightly to each other even though that action only made them hotter. The need for physical contact could only be given to them by each other since their aunt and uncle refused to touch them in anyway other than to punish them. In the world outside the cupboard they could never act the way they did when they were alone, to show each other the love they both desperately needed.

As these children laid together attempting to fall asleep the boy, became suddenly alert with a thought he had to share with his companion before being overcome with sleep.

"Did I remember to tell you what today was?" the boy asked in little more than a whisper.

"No," the little girl responded, shaking her head against his chest for good measure.

"I turned six today," the boy proudly shared.

The little girl stiffened next to him. Information about them was not regularly shared by the Dursleys. The fact that neither of them knew when their birthday was prior to this occasion was proof of this.

The little girl knew what birthdays were supposed to be like. The person turning a year older was to have a cake and lots of presents, like their cousin Dudley always got every year. The fact that her brother's birthday came and nearly went without even a "Happy Birthday" was further evidence of how different the Potter children were then everyone else.

The little girl desperately wished she could give her brother everything their cousin Dudley got a little over a month ago when he turned six. But the little girl knew there was nothing she could give him that was as amazing as all that.

Instead, the four year old girl hugged her brother tighter and kissed his cheek.

“Happy Birthday, big brother,” the little girl said loudly. She did not care if the Dursleys heard her wish her brother a happy birthday. It was the only gift she could give him.

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Harry Potter was extremely excited. Today was the first time his sister, Alex, went to school with him. While Harry and his cousin Dudley were in the same class, his sister was younger than them so she went to a different class.

All day long Harry could barely contain his excitement. Throughout the day Harry frequently attempted to find his sister, in the lunch room, when they went outside for recess, and when his class was moving through the hallways. Yet, Harry was never fortunate to see a glimpse of his sister.

Life outside Number Four was completely different then the world they knew inside the Dursley home. Harry had quickly learned that when he went to school he was just like everyone else. The teachers never called him a freak and most of the students, other than Dudley and his friends, tended to treat Harry kindly. Harry couldn't wait for his sister to experience that as well. He wanted her to be treated the same way he was.

When Aunt Petunia picked them all up from school, it was the first time that Harry had an opportunity to see his sister all day. Instead of seeing the excited and joyful face he expected, what Harry saw nearly broke his heart. His sister looked as though she was near tears. Harry wasn't sure what happened, but he was determined to find out.

The car ride home was extremely painful for Harry. He was dying to ask Alex questions, but he knew better than to openly talk to her in front of the Dursleys. So once they entered their cupboard, Harry rounded on his sister.

"What happened?" Harry intently asked.

The smaller girl just sniffed as if the dam holding her tears was about to break.

"You can tell me, Alex," Harry prompted. "Please, let me know what is wrong."

"Oh it was horrible," the little girl said in a shaky voice, her face hidden in her auburn hair. "I can't believe Aunt Petunia did it!"

"What did she do?" Harry asked the confusion was evident in his tone. What did Aunt Petunia have to do with the first day at school?

"Aunt Petunia told the school that my name is Alex!" Alexa said with a hiss. "She did not tell them my full name Alexa Potter, but Alex Potter. The teacher didn't believe me when I told her that my name wasn't Alex but Alexa. She told me the school records are never wrong."

"Oh," Harry dumbly replied. He was unsure how to respond to this news.

"All the other girls made fun of me, calling me a boy all day long." Alexa was now crying. "They kept telling me, that since I had a boy name I must really be a boy."

"You're not a boy." Harry said definitively. "They had no right to say something like that."

"Well they did," was Alexa's meek response.

Harry sighed; he never experienced something like this with school before. Harry knew his sister's name was Alexa; it was what Mr. Donaldson called her and he worked for the government, he had to be right.

"I know the truth Alex," Harry began. "You need to ignore those other children."

"I don't want to be called Alex anymore." The little girl said stubbornly. "That is a boy's name!"

"Fine," Harry replied, not eager to make his sister angry. "What if I call you Lexi?"

"Lexi," the red haired girl tried the name. "I like that."

"Fine," Harry said. "From this day forth, you shall be called Lexi Potter."

As Lexi laughed at Harry's actions, he just smiled. Getting his sister to laugh was Harry's goal.

~*~

Petunia Dursley walked around her kitchen, examining the spotless floor. There was no way that little freak could possibly clean her kitchen so well. The little freak had to use her unnaturalness to receive these perfect results.

"Tell me girl, how did you do it?" Petunia asked with a snarl.

"I don't know what you mean Aunt Petunia," the meek voice replied.

"How did you cheat?" Petunia yelled, the rage evident in her tone.

"Cheat?" The small girl asked, unable to meet Petunia's glaze.

"The floor, how did you get it so clean?" Petunia continued as if she were speaking to an invalid.

A small smile came to the little girl's face. "I cleaned it Aunt Petunia, just like you told me too. See?" The redheaded girl continued, gesturing to the floor, the pride evident in her tone. "There isn't even a spot of dirt left."

Petunia was working herself into a real rage. "You used your abnormalities to clean it, didn't you?"

"No, Aunt Petunia," the little girl's pride was replaced with something that more closely resembled fear. "I just did as you told me."

Petunia raised her hand and smacked the girl across her face. How dare that little freak lie to her! The little girl began to silently sob, and Petunia nearly smacked her again for making such a racket.

"Go to the cupboard. No meals, no school and you will stay there until I let you out." Petunia eyed the girl wearily before marching her to the cupboard, overseeing her walking into the cupboard and locking her in.

"Just like her mother in more than looks," Petunia muttered to herself, as she walked away. "The girl is a red haired devil, a freak to the core."

Petunia never noticed the green eyed boy at the top of the stairs, who heard her every word.

~*~

The hour was late yet; two young children were still very much awake. One had just finished all of his chores for the day, and was preparing for bed. While the other child was finally allowed a reprieve from the isolation she was in all day.

The small room they shared was a storage cupboard under the staircase of the Dursley household. Even though they were much too large to be sharing such a small space, the Dursleys never once made any indication that they would ever have a room of their own in this household.

The older of the two pulled a lump out of his knapsack and handed it to the smaller girl who took the package gingerly. Moving the napkin her prize was wrapped in the little girl discovered a merger meal of two small rolls and warm cheese.

"I'm sorry this was all I could sneak away." The larger boy said, but the little girl didn't seem to mind. Her wide, grateful eyes had told him all he needed to know, yet she still hugged him as tight as she could.

"Oh thank you Harry!" She said into his chest as she continued to hold onto him with all she was worth.

"There is no need to thank me," Harry replied. "I know you would have done the same for me if I were in your position."

The little girl nodded her head in agreement as she began to dig into her meal. "Harry, this is so good!" The green eyed girl whispered, just before stuffing more of her roll in her mouth.

Harry looked at his sister carefully. She always seemed to get the short end of the stick when the Dursleys were concerned. She was always given the harder or more disgusting chores, even though Harry was older and stronger. He had never understood why that was but after hearing his aunt, Harry finally started to understand.

"Lexi," Harry began, immediately her bright green eyes were focused on him. "I heard Aunt Petunia say something after you were punished." Immediately Harry regretted mentioning her punishment as tears began to well up in his sister's eyes. Yet, Harry pushed on; he knew Lexi would want to know what he did.

"Aunt Petunia said you look like our Mum."

Lexi's eyes grew wide when Harry said that. "I do?" She asked in a small voice.

"According to Aunt Petunia you do." Harry said, wishing he could confirm her question. Their parents were always a bit of a mystery since the Dursleys never talked of them. Both Harry and Lexi wanted to know as much as they could about whom they came from, now at least they had an idea about how one of them looked like.

They both had the same almond shaped, striking green eyes, although Lexi's were just a shade lighter than Harry's. The difference

was only noticeable when they were standing right next to each other. The main differences in their appearances were due to the shape of the faces and the color of their hair. Harry had a square shaped jaw, with shaggy unruly black hair. His sister on the other hand had a heart shaped face and long manageable auburn hair.

Even though they were a year apart, they were both on the short side for their ages. Frequently there were comments about the two of them being as thin as a sheet of paper. One of the aids at school had even suggested if she didn't keep her eyes on them when they were outside at recess, she was afraid the wind would blow them away. Yet since their cousin Dudley was as large as a small whale, it was also said by the staff at their school, that they must just have been made small.

"I look like mum," Lexi said more to herself than to Harry. A dreamy look crossed her face for a few moments before it suddenly became a look of realization. "Harry, that's why Aunt Petunia hates me isn't it?"

Harry had come to that realization himself, but he didn't want his sister to have a negative image of something that connected her to their mother. This was one of the times he thought Lexi was too smart for her own good.

"Yeah, Lexi," Harry reluctantly confirmed, joining his sister on the small mattress on the floor that they shared.

"I wish I looked like you." The little girl said with a sad tone to her voice.

Harry would never say it out loud but he wished she looked more like him too. If only to prevent her from being singled out by their aunt's rage.

~*~

Harry Potter sat up with a start, dust falling on his head. The staircase above his head was rattling which meant only one thing, his Uncle Vernon was up. Moving slowly as to not disturb his younger sister, Harry stood up to start the day.

Every morning Harry awoke early and prepared breakfast for his Uncle Vernon. This morning unfortunately Harry woke up late. From past experience Harry knew that waking up late was never a good thing for him. Most likely Uncle Vernon would punish Harry for making him wait.

Slipping on clean clothing eight year old Harry Potter exited the cupboard he shared with his sister and entered the kitchen prepared to face his fate.

Surprisingly to Harry, his uncle was not the person who woke up but his cousin Dudley. It was no surprise why he thought his cousin's pounding down the stairs was the same as his uncle's heavy steps. Dudley resembled a beached whale more and more every day.

"Where's the food?" The whale yelled as soon as he entered the room.

"It's coming." Harry said shortly. "Why are you up?"

"None of your business freak." Dudley said with a sneer on his face, as he concentrated on the paper in front of him.

Glancing over Dudley's shoulder on his way to the icebox, Harry recognized that Dudley was still working on their math homework from the day before. Luckily for Harry, he was usually able to complete enough of his homework to receive a passing grade before actually leaving school. Otherwise he would probably never have his homework done before lights out.

As Harry cooked the fry-up, thankful that it was Dudley that had woke him up, and not his uncle, Harry could not help but chuckle to himself about the look of concentration that played across his cousin's face. Apparently, deep thought was extremely painful for the small whale.

Just as Harry was finishing the breakfast he was cooking he heard his Aunt Petunia's light steps on the stairs, followed by the squeak of the opening of the cupboard door.

“Girl, get out here.” Petunia’s shrill voice carried through the kitchen. “This is your one chance to use the bathroom this morning.”

The scream that followed pierced right through Harry’s spine.

“WHAT DID YOU DO?” Petunia yelled.

Forgetting the breakfast Harry rushed out into the hall with Dudley to see what his aunt was screaming at. Harry nearly fell to the floor in shock at the sight before him. His sister Lexi had hair that resembled his. Her long beautiful locks of auburn hair, that they had just learned was just like their mother’s was gone. Instead her hair was jet black, and curly.

“What is it?” Lexi asked desperately looking around to see what was wrong. Harry suddenly realized she had not seen a mirror and had no idea about her changed appearance.

“Your hair,” was all Harry got out before his aunt turned around to face him and Dudley.

“Dudders, go to the kitchen.” Aunt Petunia began in a sickly sweet voice. “Mummy has to deal with the freaks.”

Dudley, too shocked to argue, simply nodded his head and ran to the kitchen. Although Harry would bet Dudley was pressed against the door trying to listen to what was happening in the hall.

“Who did this?” Aunt Petunia began again. “Which one of you freaks caused this to happen?”

Harry and Lexi looked at each other with confusion. Why did Aunt Petunia always insist they were to blame when something weird happened?

When no one answered her, Aunt Petunia rounded on Harry. “Are you to blame?”

Being directly asked Harry had no choice but to respond. Harry knew from experience that his silence would only result in being punished.

"No, Aunt Petunia," Harry said as respectfully as he could muster. He wished he could take the blame for the condition of Lexi's hair, however, since he had no idea what caused the change, he couldn't risk lying to the Dursleys if there was a reasonable explanation.

His aunt continued to stare at him as if determining whether or not to believe him. After what seemed like hours his Aunt Petunia finally announced;

"Return to the kitchen. If breakfast is burned so help me you will regret it."

Harry did as he was told, but not before looking over at his sister and sending her a look of remorse. Their wish had been answered, but it wasn't going to end well for Lexi.

~*~

The first week of school was normally a joyous occasion for the Potter children. Going to school gave them an escape from the cruel treatment of their relatives. However, this year was different.

Due to the kitchen incident of the day before, and the hair disaster of the morning, only Harry was allowed to attend past the first day. The physical punishments she could handle, the alone time in the dark cupboard she could take too. But not allowing her to attend school? As far as Lexi was concerned that was just criminal.

Lexi knew that she and her brother were very different in their approach to school. Harry just did enough to pass; if he did better than their cousin Dudley (which wasn't too hard to do) Harry would be punished.

Lexi on the other hand did as well as she could. She knew her aunt and uncle didn't care what she did or how well she did it. But her school work gave her a chance to be really good at something and be recognized for doing well at it. Even if Harry was the only one who cared.

Yet, here she was, on the second day of school sitting in Aunt Petunia's car waiting to pick up Dudley and her brother, instead of being at school, learning like them.

While sitting in the back seat, Lexi eyed the reflection of her appearance in the window. Lexi had no idea what happened to her hair. Hair just didn't change color at will. However, her hair looked just like Harry's now. Literally, just like Harry's.

After her aunt took the boys to school, she returned home and attacked her hair with a pair of scissors. Aunt Petunia drilled it into her head exactly what she was to say if anyone questioned why her hair had changed.

"No, my hair has been turning darker for months now. Couldn't you see the roots? I'd just rather my hair all be one color, so I cut it. Boy was my Aunt Petunia angry with me for doing so all by myself!"

Aunt Petunia always had an answer ready for everything. She hated be stared and gossiped about, even though she did that to other people all of the time. Having a reasonable excuse for everything allowed her to save face on the gossip circles.

Sometime Aunt Petunia was so fake, it made Lexi feel as though she were about to vomit.

The front car door suddenly swung open. Dudley had arrived, that meant it was merely a matter of moments before Harry would be there too. It was the moment of truth for Lexi. Was Harry going to hate her for doing something so freakish? For living up to what the Dursleys claimed they were? Just as she thought that the car door next to her swung open and her brother was there.

Lexi scooted over to the other side of the backseat to let Harry enter the car. He placed his large backpack on the floor of the car before looking at her with only pity in his eyes. He knew how much she loved her long hair.

At school she was always made fun of since her Aunt Petunia made her wear Harry's and Dudley's hand me downs, and it certainly didn't

help that she was enrolled as Alex Potter. The other girls at school usually called her a boy. Now that she had a boy hair cut as well they were going to be merciless.

"It's not that bad," Lexi leaned over and whispered to Harry. She was just as strong as he was, she didn't need his pity.

Harry nodded in agreement before leaning in to whisper to her in turn. "I was able to get the work you missed from your teacher." He then gestured to his enlarged book bag as if to prove his statement.

Lexi just grinned at him in return. No matter how bad the Dursleys tried to hurt them it wouldn't matter. They were Potters. They would survive and grow stronger for it.

~*~

Vernon Dursley was rightfully proud of his son Dudley. Every day he was looking and acting just like his dear old dad. Dudley was a right intelligent boy who knew exactly what he wanted in life and how he was going to get it. Why just the other day Dudley demanded another new toy he saw on the telly.

When he started crying for the toy, it was near closing time for the store. Pet was sure there wasn't enough time to get to the kid's store before it closed. But boy was Dudley insistent she tried. Sure enough, Dudley was correct, the store was open just long enough and he was able to get the toy he wanted.

To Vernon this was clear proof that Dudley was a sure minded boy who would do well later on in life working in a career similar to Vernon's. In the sales world it was important to know what you want and how to get it in order to properly make a sale. It was quite obvious that Dudley got his old man's business sense and had a clear future ahead of him.

Those freaks though, there was nothing Vernon could stand about those freaks that were related to Petunia. They were disgusting, stupid and unnatural. No matter how hard he and Petunia attempted

to stop the freakishness that surrounded those two, freaky things always happened anyways.

When the boy first went to school, his teacher had called Vernon at work in a panic. It seemed that the freak did not like something his kind teacher was told him and somehow turned her hair bright blue. The teacher wanted to know how the boy performed the trick and how to reverse it. That brat did it on purpose to make him look like a fool. Vernon knew he couldn't actually tell anyone about the freak's unnaturalness.

The girl was worse than the boy. Not only had she changed her own hair color permanently one day but she had a tendency to violently react to other children at school which caused her unnaturalness to show. One day one of Dudley's little friends had tried to play with the girl even though Dudley warned him not to. According to Dudley his friend Piers flew in the air nearly 20 yards without being pushed or moved in anyway. Luckily only Dudley saw exactly what happened that day, so Vernon wasn't disturbed at work on that occasion.

No matter what Vernon did those freaks still found ways to display their unnaturalness; it didn't matter how many times he attempted to knock the freakiness out of the brats, they still found ways to display it. The one thing Vernon could do was stop them from attending that crack pot school their parents went to. Perhaps Vernon would be able to save them from the unnatural fate their parents suffered from.

~*~

"Oh my precious Dudders!" Aunt Petunia cried as she began to give her son a large amount of hugs and kisses.

Lexi Potter had to refrain herself from gagging at the sight of her enormous cousin being at risk of being smothered by her small aunt. However the ever ridiculous sight was before her. All Dudley did was receive a "C" on a book report. Her cousin was average. That's it. He wasn't exceptional.

Lexi had seen her brother sneak into the cupboard as soon as they returned home from school. She knew Harry had to have received a

higher mark than Dudley on the assignment, and must be hiding the returned paper to only share with her later tonight.

While the Dursleys had no interest in how she and Harry did at school, they cared how the other did. She always shared her grades, successes, and failures with Harry and he did the same with her. That's what family does.

Luckily she and Harry would soon be assigned their daily chores so, they would not be forced to watch the display of Aunt Petunia gushing over her average son.

~*~

Later that night in the cupboard under the stairs, Lexi still couldn't get over the display that was made for Dudley's "C" paper. She knew due to Harry's dodgy behavior all afternoon that Harry had received a higher mark than Dudley. At least Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon were so wrapped up in Dudley's success they completely forgot about Harry and her.

At last count Dudley had been showered with seven presents for his miraculous performance as well given as much sweets as a pig could ever eat. The thing that had stayed with Lexi the most was that Aunt Petunia kept telling Dudley that they gave him things because they loved and were proud of him.

That just made Lexi's blood boil, and reminder her that no one ever gave her or Harry anything special for doing well on anything. Gaining control of her emotions Lexi finally turned and faced her brother. She would not want him to think she was angry at him when she was really mad at the Dursleys.

Harry was already sitting on their mattress with his book report in his hands, not meeting her gaze. As she sat down next to him she could see the "A" displayed on the page.

"Congratulations," Lexi said indicating the book report. "What did you teacher say?"

"Miss Farris said I did an excellent job." Harry said, sadness laced his voice as the paper began to crumple in his hands.

"Don't Harry!" Lexi attempted to stop him from destroying his hard work, but it was useless. Harry had begun ripping up his book report.

"Why not Lexi," Harry challenged her. "Why does it matter? No one cares and I actually dodged a bullet by the Dursleys being distracted by precious Dudley." Harry spat out the last two words.

"I care," Lexi said quietly. "I care a lot. You worked so hard on the book report Harry; it's horrible that you destroyed all that hard work."

Harry studied her for a moment before replying. "Thank you Lexi, but I need to be more careful. What if Uncle Vernon wanted to compare our scores? He would have been furious that I beat Dudley."

"I didn't think of that Harry," Lexi admitted. "You have it worse than me. The Dursleys never care what I do but with you being in Dudley's grade, it must be so hard!"

Harry made a noncommittal grunt. It was almost as though he refused to acknowledge what she had said.

Lexi didn't know what to say or do. So instead she just hugged Harry. After a few minutes of just sitting there Lexi remembered what Aunt Petunia had told Dudley and knew it was what Harry needed to hear.

"You did a good job Harry." Lexi hesitantly began, "I'm proud of you and I love you."

Harry's grip around her shoulders tightened as she said those words. After a few more minutes Harry finally pulled away, but not before sharing something of his own.

"Lexi, I'm always proud of you and remember that I always love you."

The mere mention of those words warmed Lexi up with tremendous joy. Silently she vowed to herself to always let Harry know that she loved him and was proud of everything he did.

~*~

Petunia surveyed the brats standing in front of her. They were wearing new clothing and were properly washed for a change. Three times a year they went through this, and every time that they did she was always fearful that the brats would slip up and get them in trouble.

Granted as they got older it was easier to control them. The freaks were properly afraid of what could happen to them if she or Vernon were angered by their performance. When they were younger she would promise them treats or gifts for a good interview. Surprisingly they never caught on that even if they were picture perfect they were never going to actually get that toy car or doll.

But now, they were nine and eight years old respectively. They knew exactly what kind of power Petunia and Vernon had over them, and how miserable their lived would be if they screwed up.

"Mr. Donaldson will see you now," the young receptionist said with a smile on her face.

Schooling her face into a cheerful expression Petunia thanked the girl before leading the brats into the office.

"Alexa, Harry, my have the two of you grown!" Mr. Donaldson said with excitement in his voice when he saw the freaks. Boy did they had him fooled.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Donaldson." The brats said in a freakish unison.

"Mrs. Dursley," the man said finally addressing her.

Petunia just nodded her head in acknowledgment. If he wasn't going to show her proper respect, why would she show him any?

"Alright," he said. "Let's get down to business, shall we?"

The freaks nodded in agreement, while Mr. Donaldson opened a folder. A folder which Petunia knew held important information about the lives of her family and the brats.

“Alex, congratulations on your recent report card,” the man began. “Your teacher comments that you have the highest marks in your grade. That is an amazing accomplishment.”

Petunia filed that information away to remember at a later date. She couldn’t help but wonder how the little freak was managing to use her unnaturalness to cheat at school.

Glancing at her watch, Petunia realized she had at least another thirty to forty minutes of praising the freaks before Mr. Donaldson would permit them to leave for another four months. At least the freaks continued good behavior would ensure the government checks for taking in the brats would continue to come.

~*~

For most children Christmas was a happy time of year. However, Harry and Lexi Potter never had that great of a Christmas. Many children, including their cousin Dudley received many presents from Father Christmas and their relatives. However, neither of the Potter children ever received any gifts.

At first their Aunt Petunia told them that Father Christmas didn’t give presents to freaks since they were unnatural. Yet, everyone who knew them always acted like they should have been given something. Teachers, doctors, and even Mr. Donaldson thought that they should have gotten something. But they never did, and Harry was too embarrassed to ever admit that he and Lexi never got gifts since they were freaks.

The Dursleys had a strict ritual they performed for Christmas. Dudley would receive hundreds of gifts and open those presents under the Christmas tree in the front room while his Uncle Vernon recorded it using a camcorder. Then they would have a large Christmas brunch followed a little later by a larger Christmas dinner.

Harry and his sister Lexi not only did not receive any Christmas gifts but they also were not able to partake in the Christmas meals. Frankly, Christmas for the Potter children was not a joyous day, but a day that reminded them that they were not the same as the Dursley family. They were second class citizens in the Dursley household.

During Harry's first year at school he came up with a plan. If the Dursleys exchanged Christmas presents with Dudley, why couldn't he give something to Lexi?

The weeks leading up to Christmas, as Aunt Petunia was preparing the Dursley household with Christmas presents, Harry was creating the perfect gift for his sister. Harry knew it was very simple, but he didn't have any money to buy her something special.

Harry's gift was a picture drawn by him of Lexi and he, sitting together in the park, with two figures off in the distance that was supposed to be their parents. He created a frame of colored tissue paper around it and wrapped it with left over scraps of wrapping paper that he found in Aunt Petunia's room.

Yet, when Lexi woke up on Christmas morning to find a gift for her, the joy she showed caused Harry to radiate with pleasure. It didn't matter that the gift he had given her wasn't worth any money like Dudley's new toys. The gift Harry had given his sister was worth far more than everything Dudley had been given.

Ever since that Christmas, Harry and Lexi made things for each other for Christmas and exchanged them Christmas morning. Every year it was increasingly difficult to hide their gifts from one another due to the fact that they shared a living space. But this year Harry felt his gift would be the best.

Harry, who was now nine years old, for the first time was able to buy his sister a gift. Every once in a while Harry was able to find some coins either on the floor at school or in the couch cushions at the Dursleys and Harry had saved up all the money he was able to find. With it he purchased a hair barrette for Lexi. She never had one before and Harry knew she secretly wanted one, so she could be just like all the other girls in her grade.

On Christmas morning Harry was not to be disappointed, when Lexi opened the gift the smile that appeared on her face and the bone crushing hug she caught him in was all the thanks he needed. He had been his sister's hero, and made her Christmas just a little bit more memorable.

~*~

A shrill scream rang through Privet Drive, and Lexi knew nothing good was going to come from it. Her Aunt Petunia had found the vase she accidentally broke earlier that day. She didn't mean to break it. Lexi had accidentally slipped as she was waxing the hardwood floor, and crashed into the vase causing it to fall to the ground a break.

"Which one of you freaks did this?" Aunt Petunia's angry voice carried through the door of the cupboard.

Lexi subconsciously rubbed the severely bruised arm, from when she was 'punished' the day before for not properly cutting the vegetables for the stew Aunt Petunia was making. The newly nine year old girl did not know how she was going to hide any additional bruises she would receive for this offense.

"I did," a strong male voice called out. "I'm sorry Aunt-"

But the voice was cut off with the sound of an audible smack. Tears freely fell down Lexi's face as she understood what was happening outside of the cupboard. Her big brother Harry took the fall for her. He knew she broke the vase and didn't want to see her punished for it, so he claimed he did it.

Lexi loved her brother more than anyone else in the world. She would do anything in her power for him, as he would do for her. She just wished she wasn't such a screw up and that he was forever taking the blame for her mistakes.

The door to the cupboard was flung open so quickly Lexi barely had time to hide the homework she was working on. Harry was forcefully pushed into the cupboard before the door was slammed behind him.

Red hand marks were clearly visible on one side of his body in the dim light of the cupboard.

Without meaning to Lexi began to sob. She was the one who should be hurt, not her wonderful, amazing brother. Harry gingerly opened his arms to her and Lexi carefully clung to his body. She did want to hurt him any worse where he was already injured.

As she continued to cry, Harry comfortingly began to stroke his finger through her short hair. Her brother always knew how to make her feel better.

~*~

Harry was running as fast as his legs would carry him. His cousin Dudley and his gang of friends were chasing him as usual. Their favorite game was to go Potter Hunting. They were looking for Lexi, yet Harry would not give them the satisfaction of finding her. She was a younger girl who wasn't as strong as they were. It just proved what bullies they were that Lexi was the preferred Potter target.

"Hey bone heads!" Harry cried out. Sure enough Dudley and his friends stopped going towards the bushes Harry knew Lexi was hiding in and turned to face him.

"Has anyone told you lately what gits the lot of you are?" Harry stood there and watched them consider the insult for a few moments before the gist of Harry's message sunk in.

"Get him," Dudley yelled as his gang of friends began chasing after Harry.

The safest way to stop a Potter Hunt was to run past a staff member at the school. This was school recess; everyone was outside enjoying the nice day. Unfortunately that meant there were a lot of students out and about but not that many teachers and staff members. There were just too many clusters of students to find someone who would scare off the gang chasing him.

As Harry continued to duck and dive between groups of students he managed to keep an eye on Dudley and his friends to make sure they were still behind him. It would do no good to lose them only to have them seek out Lexi instead.

Making a fool hardy decision Harry navigated his path to run closer to the school. There were fewer students around the school and logistically it may be easier for Dudley to catch him, but it was also more likely for them to run across a teacher than anywhere else.

As Harry reached the corner of the school he realized he was trapped. He had reached an alley that was only accessible from one side. He had reached a dead end and there was no one to distract Dudley's gang from their prey.

The clonking footsteps of Dudley and his friends continued to grow louder as they became closer to Harry's position. At that moment Harry closed his eyes and wished that he was somewhere else, out of the reach of his cousin Dudley.

A tight squeezing sensation over came Harry and when he opened his eyes he realized his wish had come true. He was no longer on the ground near Dudley's gang. Instead he was on the roof of the school overlooking the spot that he was just standing at.

On the ground below him Harry saw Dudley and his gang circling the area Harry should have been. Obviously confused that Harry wasn't where he should be the gang eventually broke up looking for Harry in different directions.

Harry had avoided being beat up, the only problem was Harry didn't know how he got up there or how he was going to get down.

~*~

The door to the cupboard finally opened and Lexi entered their room. Harry had been in the cupboard since he arrived home. When one of the teachers finally noticed Harry on the roof, they immediately called the custodian to get a ladder to get him down. Unfortunately the headmaster of his primary school also contacted his relatives.

In the worst twist of fate possible his aunt was not at home when the school attempted to contact her. This meant the headmaster had to call his Uncle Vernon at work. The worst time to disturb Vernon Dursley about the Potters was while he was at work.

Needless to say Uncle Vernon was not amused at being disrupted and he immediately picked Harry up from school and locked him in the cupboard. That was over eight hours ago.

“Oh Harry!” Lexi cried as she flung herself on her brother. “What happened?”

Harry sighed, “I don’t know.”

Lexi pulled herself off his chest so she could look him in the eyes. “How could you not know?”

“I just don’t,” Harry reluctantly admitted. “One minute I was standing on the ground wishing I was out if reach of Dudley. The next I was on the roof.”

Lexi just continued to stare at Harry. Harry wasn’t sure how to respond to this. This was proof he was the freak his aunt and uncle claimed he was. Maybe Lexi would want to keep her distance from him and his freakishness.

“My hair,” Lexi suddenly said, distracting Harry from his gloomy thoughts. “We don’t know how my hair suddenly turned dark. Just like we don’t know how you got on the roof of the school. I guess weird thing just seem to happen around us Potters.”

Harry let out a breath he wasn’t aware he was holding. Of course she wouldn’t be repulsed by him. Lexi was his sister. She would always be there for him no matter what, just like he was there for her.

“I love you Harry,” Lexi said. “And remember, Potters always stick together.”

With that Lexi kissed him on the cheek and began to get ready for bed. The final thought kept running through Harry's head, Potters always stick together.

~*~

A/N: Thank you for reading my second chapter! Once again I have to give major credit to my amazing beta and friend Zephy. Without her my work would be riddled with grammar errors. The next chapter should be out soon!

Next Chapter: The Letter and the Plan

Chapter 3: The Letter and the Plan

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley were very proud of their son Dudley. He had recently turned eleven years old and had been accepted to the same secondary school that Mr. Dursley had attended in his youth, Smeltings School. Dudley was very popular in school, with a core group of four friends that he did most things with. All and all everything seemed to be going perfectly with the Dursley family where Dudley was concerned.

The only area of disgrace in the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Dursley were their nephew and niece, the Potter brats. Mr. and Mrs. Dursley always knew the Potter brats were different and were a source of trouble in their household. The Dursleys were well aware that those two brats would follow in their parents' footsteps. With the unnatural things that tended to happen when the brats were younger, how could they not be freaks?

Now with the older freak's eleventh birthday rapidly approaching the moment of truth was upon them. That letter from that school should be arriving at anytime now. All Mr. and Mrs. Dursley could do was keep a watch on things to see if their fears would be proven true.

~*~

Harry Potter awoke with a start. His sister Lexi was standing directly over him, waiting for him to wake up. After adjusting to her presence, Harry decided it might be best to figure out exactly what his sister wanted.

"Lexi, what are you up to?" Harry asked opening one eye to look at her.

"Where did you get it?" Lexi asked in an accusing tone.

"Get what?" Harry asked, truly confused at what she was referring to.

"This," Lexi hissed as she thrust a hand full of money in his face.

Harry's face drained at the sight of the money. "Where did you-"

"I found it while changing this morning." Lexi cut him off.

"I can explain," Harry said while Lexi gave him a look of disbelief before allowing him to continue. "I've been saving up pocket change that I've found."

"Why?" Lexi asked, clearly upset Harry was keeping something from her.

"You're going to be alone at school for the first time." Harry tried to explain, "You can get that dress you've always wanted so you will look more like a girl and those other children will finally stop picking on you. I thought I'd get it for you before school started and you could have an early birthday present."

Lexi tackled Harry in a bone crushing hug; muffled words of thanks could barely be heard. After holding one another for a few moments, Lexi finally broke away.

"I'm sorry that I've been a little testy Harry," Lexi said with down cast eyes.

"Lexi, it's no problem," Harry said while wrapping his arm around her shoulder.

"No Harry it is," Lexi protested. "You always get me such great presents. I always feel like mine to you, don't add up."

"Lexi," Harry began in a tried voice. "I love all your gifts to me. Don't sell yourself short."

"But your birthday is coming up and-" Lexi began before she was cut off.

"And I'd love any gift you gave me, simply because it came from you." Harry said in a stern tone. Hoping that this time she would understand that monetary values meant nothing on whether or not he liked a gift from her.

If the mollified look on Lexi's face was any indication, then she may have finally understood he loved her gifts because she was the one who gave it to him.

~*~

For Lexi it was a typical morning in the Dursley household. They were all congregated in the kitchen. Harry was cooking the Dursleys' fry-up. Dudley was proclaiming some nonsense about how wonderful his Smeltings whacking stick was. Uncle Vernon was reading the newspaper while sipping his coffee, while Aunt Petunia was plotting some way to make the Potter children's lives miserable.

Today Aunt Petunia was dying some of Dudley's old clothing for Harry to use when he attended Stonewall High in a little over a month. According to Aunt Petunia by dying the clothing grey, the school's uniform color, it is just as good as buying Harry the required new uniform.

Lexi couldn't help but roll her eyes at extremes her aunt would go to in order to make Harry and her lives miserable. Even though Harry and Dudley were finally going to different schools, it appeared that the Dursleys were determined to make sure Harry didn't have any friends.

Not that Lexi had any friends. Dudley had scared all the other children away from being around her. It was well known that Alex Potter was a freaky girl who really wanted to be a boy. Dudley spread that rumor around when Lexi's hair was cut short like a boy's. It didn't help that Aunt Petunia never bought her any new clothing, except when they went to see Mr. Donaldson, and then Aunt Petunia usually returned the new dress to the store the next day.

So Lexi was the girl who was always wearing boy clothing and who looked like a boy as well. Even when she wore the pretty hair barrette Harry got her for Christmas two years ago at school, the other kids still called her a boy. But now that Dudley was gone, things would be different. Lexi and Harry for that matter could start fresh and deal with whatever handicaps Aunt Petunia threw their way.

Lexi was broken out of her musings when the mail slipped through the mail slot. The action of the mail being delivered was never that loud, but the actions surrounding the delivering of the mail, were what caught her attention.

“Dudley, go get the mail,” Uncle Vernon said from behind his newspaper.

Dudley, who was eyeing Harry, replied, “Daddy, make the freak do it!”

Lexi noticed exactly what Dudley was doing immediately. With how far along Harry was, if he left the fry-up unattended for a moment, it would most surely burn, and Harry would be punished for doing so. If Harry refused to do it he would be punished. Basically Dudley was trying to get Harry punished this morning.

“Boy, go get the mail,” Uncle Vernon announced.

“I’ll get it!” Lexi said as she jumped up from the table, and walked from the room. Harry shot her a grateful look as she walked by; he too knew what Dudley was up to.

Once reaching the front door, Lexi picked up the items of mail. Bill, bill, post card from Aunt Marge, letter for Harry-

Letter for Harry? Lexi stopped in her tracks and read the full address on the letter.

Mr. H Potter

The Cupboard under the Stairs

4 Privet Drive

Little Whinging

Surrey

Harry never received a letter before, this was definitely unusual, especially the specific address. No one outside the Dursley family

knew they slept in the cupboard under the stairs. Something inside of her was screaming at her, telling her not to let the letter be seen by the Dursleys. Making an impromptu decision Lexi stuffed the letter to Harry under the door of their cupboard, before returning to the kitchen.

Now all Lexi had to do was wait until she and Harry could be alone, to share the existence of his letter with him. Something told her it was going to be a very long day.

~*~

It was nearly midnight when the Potter siblings were finally alone in a relatively private place for Lexi to share the letter with her brother. All day long she had attempted to manipulate things so the two of them would be alone, yet it was as if fate itself was against them. But now in the safety of their cupboard Lexi could finally share with Harry, his letter.

"Harry, this came in the mail for you," Lexi said, the excitement evident in her tone.

"For me? Are you sure, Lexi?" Harry asked as he gingerly took the letter from his sister.

"Well, it has your name on it!" Lexi laughed.

"The Cupboard under the Stairs," Harry muttered. "Who knows we sleep in the cupboard?"

"I don't know," Lexi cried. "Please Harry! Just open the letter, we'll find out then." The suspense really was killing her.

Harry chuckled as he turned over the letter to expose a unique seal closing the envelope. It had the letter 'H' predominantly in the middle with a badger, a loin, an eagle and a snake on it. With some words that were definitely not English scrolled across the bottom.

After both children were able to take in the seal, Harry ripped open the envelope. And out fell the weirdest paper Lexi had ever seen. It

was ticker and heavier than normal paper and the ink that adorned the pages was an emerald green.

The cupboard was too dark for Lexi to read the words over Harry's shoulder, instead she asked him to read the letter out loud.

"Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," Harry began, "Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore."

Lexi did a double take. "Harry, did you just say-"

"Yeah, Lex," Harry said while rereading the top of the letter. "It's a school of witchcraft and wizardry."

"Keep reading," Lexi pestered. "Let's hear the rest."

"Dear, Mr. Potter, We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." Harry paused for a few moments as if taking it in for a minute. "Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and supplies. Term begins on September 1st. We await your owl by no later than July 31st. Yours sincerely, Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress."

Both children sat in silence for several minutes. Neither able to comprehend what was just read. A magical boarding school, to Lexi it was like a dream come true. They would be far away from the Dursleys for most of the year, safe from the Dursleys interference on their lives.

"Harry, you're a wizard," Lexi exclaimed, after a short while, breaking the silence that encompassed them.

"This has to be a joke." Harry countered, unable to accept what he was reading. "You know Dudley tried to force me to get the mail this morning. This has to be something he schemed up."

"I think you're giving Dudley too much credit. There is no way he could have planned out something as elaborate as this." Lexi replied, not about to let this be considered a joke.

"Come on Lexi, magic isn't real." Harry answered, "You know what Uncle Vernon always says."

"He's wrong Harry." Lexi argued. "My hair changed color over night like magic. This is the answer to all the weird thing that happens around us. Why the Dursleys call us freaks. This is it! We're magic!"

Lexi's excitement seemed to spread to Harry. His doubtful expression changed to one of hope, as he continued to read the additional pages of the letter to himself.

"Magic," Harry began, "you really think magic is real."

"Yes," was Lexi's simple response.

"But Lexi only I got a letter," Harry said. "You didn't."

The thought had crossed Lexi. Why hadn't she received a letter as well? There was only one reason that Harry got a letter and she didn't that she could think of.

"I believe I'm too young to go to that school Harry." Lexi explained. "You didn't get one until just before you go off to secondary school."

The look of joy drained from Harry's face, so fast Lexi didn't even see it happen.

"I'm not going." Harry said in a determined voice. "I'm not leaving you here all one with them."

The level of venom and hatred in Harry's voice took Lexi by surprise. She knew he detested the Dursleys as much as she did, but he rarely expressed it to her.

"But Harry," Lexi began but Harry cut her off.

"No Lexi," Harry said firmly. "It's time to go to sleep."

Lexi knew when Harry got in one of these moods there was no arguing with him. Lexi silently climbed onto their mattress followed

closely by Harry. Perhaps tomorrow Harry would be a bit more reasonable.

~*~

The next morning Harry silently climbed out of bed and escaped the cupboard without waking Lexi. He knew she wouldn't drop the issue. The letter from the night before had plagued his sleep all night long, and he just couldn't face a discussion about it with her again. Harry wasn't completely convinced that this letter wasn't just a joke. But if it were real, well then Lexi was right, it would explain a lot about the odd things that tended to go on around them.

Since it was Sunday, Harry collected the newspaper before he began cooking the Dursleys' breakfast. But when he reached down to grab the paper; Harry had the shock of his life. Two more letters were sitting on the Sunday paper. Not only that, but an owl was sitting on the lamp post watching Harry.

Didn't the letter say something about an owl?

Without hesitating Harry opened one of the letters on the front step. Sure enough we await your owl by no later than July 31st. Was that why the owl was staring at him? What was he supposed to do with the owl?

"I told you it was real," Lexi's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"I can see that," Harry dryly replied. "But it doesn't matter. I'm not going. You hear that, bird? Get lost."

Harry turned around to reenter the house but was stopped by Lexi. She stood directly in his path and made no move to get out of the way.

"If I got one of those letters, would you want me to go to Hogwarts, even if it meant leaving you here alone?" Lexi asked in a soft voice.

"Of course I would," Harry quickly responded. "It would be your chance to escape, to get away from them." Harry spat the last word like it was an insult.

"Harry," Lexi began. "That's the way I feel. You need to go."

Harry looked into her green eyes and saw her sincerity in them. But he was her older brother; he was supposed to protect her. How could he do that from a boarding school?

"Lexi, I can't do it," Harry said in a defeated voice.

"Do you want to?" Lexi asked. "Be honest with me. I know when you're hiding something from me."

"If it's real," Lexi rolled her eyes as Harry continued, "then yes, I'd like to learn magic."

"Good, then we need to send that owl, saying you'll go," Lexi responded moving into the house.

"But Lexi, I can't," Harry said in barely more than a whisper.

"No, Harry," Lexi hissed back in a whisper of her own. "You're going, because if you don't then I won't be able to accept mine when I'm in your position."

Harry's jaw dropped. "You would have to go if you got one," he replied.

Lexi looked him over, before answering. "If you don't go to Hogwarts now, then I won't be able to go later."

"You're assuming you'll get a letter," Harry countered.

"Of course I will." Lexi said with a laugh in her voice. "I've done a lot more magical things than you have."

"What if I really did it?" Harry asked her in a serious tone. "What if you're not a wizard and all the magic around us was caused by me?"

Lexi looked at Harry with a strange look in her eye. It was at that moment that Harry realized she never considered that she was not magical. If Harry was, Lexi must have assumed she was as well.

“Then you better learn how to turn Dudley into a newt. I’ll expect nothing less from you.”

With that Lexi pulled out one of her school assignments from the last term. She ripped off a clean piece of the paper and handed it to Harry.

“Write to Hogwarts,” Lexi commanded. “Tell them you’re going. We’ll figure out the rest of it later.”

Harry looked at the paper, and then looked back at Lexi. He really wanted to go. He wanted to do this. Lexi wanted him to do this as well, Harry reminded himself. Harry realized his mind was made up.

Grabbing a pen, Harry wrote a simple response.

Deputy Headmistress McGonagall,

I will be attending Hogwarts this term.

Harry Potter

Looking at Lexi’s radiant smile, Harry knew he made the right decision, even though it was difficult for him to make.

“Now, how are we supposed to have the owl return this to Hogwarts?” Harry asked Lexi.

Lexi looked at him with a quizzical expression on her face. Harry bit back a laugh, knowing they would figure it out together. They were Potters after all.

~*~

Ever since the first letter arrived, Lexi was insistent either she or Harry gather the mail. That way, in case another letter came the

Dursleys would be unaware of the correspondence. Harry had to admit he never considered the possibility of a follow up letter, but Lexi asked him how was he supposed to get to Hogwarts, and Harry too realized he needed more information.

Two days after Harry sent his reply to Hogwarts a second letter arrived. This time Harry was the one who got the mail. Copying Lexi's movements from days before, Harry slid the letter under the cupboard door, and carried on with his daily routine.

Later that evening Lexi and Harry once again converged in their cupboard safe from the Dursleys over hearing them. Harry gingerly opened the envelope, which was once again addressed to Mr. H. Potter.

Lexi waited in baited breath as Harry took longer than necessary time to open his letter. He knew it was cruel to keep his sister waiting in suspense, but the look of concentration on her face was simply hilarious. When Lexi finally looked at Harry as if to ask him to hurry it up, Harry finished ripping open the envelope and pulled out the letter.

"Dear Mr. Potter," Harry began to read, skipping over the heading. "Let me be the first to officially welcome you to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The Hogwarts Express will be leaving Kings Cross Platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$ at precisely 11am on September 1st. Your ticket is enclosed. Yours sincerely, Minerva McGonagall."

"Oh, Harry," Lexi exclaimed. "This is really happening." Lexi grabbed Harry in a bone crushing hug with such force they both fell over onto the mattress they shared.

"It is," Harry responded.

"You won't forget me once you go to Hogwarts will you?" Lexi asked.

"Forget you?" Harry replied, "How in the world would I be able to forget you?" Harry said as he rolled over to better look at Lexi. "You're my sister; I'll never be able to forget you."

The only reply Harry got was Lexi hugging him tighter. After a few moments of silence, an important question popped into Harry's mind.

"Lexi, how am I going to find the supplies on the Hogwarts list?" Harry asked before continuing, "Let alone find the supplies, how am I going to pay for them?"

Lexi lifted her head to look at Harry in the eyes. "I think you should just go there. There has to be a school-assisted fund or perhaps you could use library books and such." Lexi bit her lip as she continued, "Also, Aunt Petunia will have to buy you school supplies for Stonewall, you can take them with you to use at Hogwarts."

Harry stared at Lexi in shock.

"You've really thought this through haven't you?"

"Well someone had to," Lexi said with a smug smile on her face. "I've been trying to think of the logistics for a while, and I think it's best if you just go there. They won't send you away; I'm sure of that. You'll make do."

"You seem so confident about it," Harry replied, his unease evident in his voice. "I wish I had your confidence."

Lexi shot him a brilliant smile, "It's alright Harry. I'll be confident for the both of us. You just go to Hogwarts and be the best wizard you can be."

Harry held on to his sister as he continued to lay there. It was really happening; it was just a matter of whether or not Harry was ready for it. Since Lexi thought he could do it, there was no doubt in his mind he would be able to follow her plan.

~*~

Harry's eleventh birthday came and went without any fanfare from the Dursleys. The only person who acknowledged Harry's birthday was Lexi, which was exactly as Harry anticipated, would happen. For his eleventh birthday Lexi had given Harry a grey tee-shirt a bit shyly.

Apparently Harry wasn't the only Potter saving spare change for presents.

Lexi told Harry she had purchased the shirt prior to the Hogwarts letter arriving. She had bought it so Harry would have at least one nice shirt to wear at Stonewall High. Harry thanked her immensely, pleased that his sister would put so much effort in a gift for him. Harry promised her he would wear the shirt on his first day to Hogwarts instead.

Starting the day of Harry's birthday, one thing did change. Aunt Petunia insisted on collecting the mail every day. Every time she picked up the mail, she would carefully scan each item before breathing a sigh of relief. Aunt Petunia's strange behavior was confusing for Dudley, yet Lexi and Harry knew exactly what was going on.

Aunt Petunia knew all about the magical world. She also knew Harry would receive his Hogwarts letter now that he was eleven years old. Most of all, Aunt Petunia's behavior made it perfectly clear that she was attempting to prevent Harry from receiving his Hogwarts letter.

"It's almost comical," Lexi whispered to Harry one morning after Petunia collected the mail. "The way Aunt Petunia waits anxiously for the mail only to be completely let down, day after day. I wonder what she will do when she learns you have had your letter all this time."

Harry couldn't help the small chuckle that escaped his lips. Lexi was right; Aunt Petunia was acting completely mental when it came to the mail. But the month of August was coming to a close faster than Harry expected and before he knew it was time to go to Hogwarts.

~*~

August 31st, was an extremely stressful day for Harry Potter. It was the day; he was going to tell the Dursleys he was going to Hogwarts. Now all he had to do was follow Lexi's plan. Harry's aunt and uncle were enjoying a relaxing evening in the living room. Uncle Vernon wanted a telly program, while Aunt Petunia blabbed on about the latest gossip going around the neighborhood.

Harry boldly walked into the living room and stood in front of the television. It was the only sure way Harry knew to get the Dursleys' attention.

"Boy! What on earth do you think you are doing?" Uncle Vernon bellowed.

"I need to speak with the both of you," Harry replied.

"Well, get talking, do you need more chores to do?" Vernon spat.

"Please turn off the television," Harry countered, staring at his Uncle Vernon. After a few moments, without Vernon turning off the telly, Harry continued, "I'll keep standing here until you turn off the telly."

"Fine!" Vernon finally shouted as he turned off the television set. "This better be good, boy!"

Harry cleared his throat before he began. "As of tomorrow I will be a Hogwarts student, and I will need a ride to Kings Cross tomorrow morning to catch the train to school."

A loud hiss came from the direction where Aunt Petunia sat the moment the word 'Hogwarts' escaped his lips. Harry whirled his head around in his aunt's direction, only to find her with a horrified expression on her face. Her mouth was moving but no words were coming out of her mouth. On any other occasion Harry would have found her reaction comical.

"PETUNIA!" Uncle Vernon bellowed the anger evident in his tone. "I thought I told you to put a stop to all this. You were supposed to stop the boy from getting his letter."

"I, I tried Vernon," Aunt Petunia responded in a shaky voice, completely ignoring Harry's presence. "I got the mail every day from his eleventh birthday on. There is no way he should have received that letter!" Aunt Petunia's voice had grown more confident with each passing word.

"It came a few days before my birthday," Harry supplied once again placing the Dursleys attention on him.

"And what gave you the right to tell those freaks you'd attend their school?" Uncle Vernon asked his voice laced with barely suppressed rage.

Harry took a deep breath, they had anticipated this question. "The letter was addressed to 'Mr. H. Potter,' not to 'The Guardians of Mr. H. Potter.' Since the letter was addressed to me, I was well within my rights to respond to it, and accept a position as a student at Hogwarts."

"How dare you speak to me that way?" Uncle Vernon screamed, jumping out of his chair reaching his arms out to grab Harry.

However, Vernon never exactly reached Harry, for he was stopped suddenly by the sound of his wife's voice, uttering one simple sentence.

"Good riddance."

Harry and Vernon both turned and looked at Petunia with matching looks of shock on their faces. Uncle Vernon simply collapsed back down into his chair.

"Oh honestly Vernon," Petunia continued, once again ignoring Harry's presence. "It's better this way. The freaks will be out of this home sooner and we can concentrate on getting our lives back to where they were before they came to live with us." Petunia tipped her head to the side, as if to consider a thought before continuing. "The only real pity is that we can't send the girl at the same time as the boy. We'll have to wait two more years before we can be rid of her as well."

"But Pet," Vernon protested. "We were going to stop that magic nonsense."

"It's better this way," Petunia argued. "Maybe it will get them killed just like my sister and that husband of hers."

"What?" Harry choked out, unable to believe what he was hearing. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Lexi standing in the door way to the kitchen. At least she was hearing this as well, if they were possibly to learn something new about their family.

"You heard me," Petunia continued acknowledging Harry's presence once more. "Magic got your mummy and daddy killed. Still want to be a wizard? Do you still want your sister to be a witch?"

"But, but..." Harry stammered, trying to wrap his mind around what he had learned. "You said my parents died in a car crash!"

"Stupid boy," Aunt Petunia barked out a cruel laugh. "We had to tell the neighbors something when we were suddenly landed with you freaks in the middle of the night. We couldn't tell them that your parents got themselves blown up."

"Blown up?" Harry repeated, as if trying to determine that was really what he heard.

"Yes, blown up." Aunt Petunia said with narrowing eyes. "Magic got them killed. They got what they deserved for being something unnatural. As I'm sure you will as well."

"You've always known about magic?" Harry asked trying to determine exactly how much his aunt knew about magic, and if there was anything more he could learn from her tonight.

"Of course not," Aunt Petunia hissed, apparently offended by Harry's question. "I only learned about it when perfect Lily got her ruddy letter on her eleventh birthday. We were a normal family, until that day when Lily found out she was a witch." Petunia stopped and looked at Harry as if determining how much more to tell him before she continued.

"You see, I was the only one who saw her for what she was, a freak. My mum and dad were so proud to have a witch in the family. It was as if they were blind to her freakish nature. I knew it was unnatural to turn tea cups in to hamsters. Even if they never realized it, I did."

"I did everything in my power to stop you and that sister of yours from being as unnatural as your parents," Aunt Petunia continued. "Obviously I failed. From this point forth, I wash my hands of you. If you want to go to that school, then so be it. It's your funeral."

Uncle Vernon was gob-smacked. Harry could clearly see that. No one uttered a word for several long moments. After what seemed like an eternity, Uncle Vernon finally recovered enough to speak once again.

"Petunia, we are the adults," Uncle Vernon began. "We are the freaks guardians. We ultimately decide whether or not they attend that place."

"No Vernon," Aunt Petunia firmly responded. "It's too late for that. He answered that letter; the freaks know he wants to join them. If we try to refuse him admission to the poor excuse for a school, then they will use their hocus pocus on us and force us to let him go. If we try to hide him, they would just follow us until they got him. It's just better this way," Aunt Petunia said before letting out a small sigh.

Harry could tell that his uncle wanted to continue to argue about this, but he seemed almost reluctant to do so.

"You know best Pet." Uncle Vernon finally responded, the defeat evident in his tone. "You are the one with the most experience with those freaks. The boy will go to that freaky school, but I'll be damned if I pay one penny to help him get there."

Uncle Vernon's last sentence put a chill in Harry's heart.

"Uncle Vernon, about getting a ride to Kings Cross tomorrow-" Harry began before he was cut off by his uncle's deep laughter.

"Were you listening, or are you just dim?" Uncle Vernon questioned. "I'm not paying a penny to help you go to freak school. I won't be giving you a ride tomorrow. You want to go to freak school; you find your own way to get there."

Harry just continued to stand there, staring at his aunt and uncle but they both completely ignored his presence. Harry knew that was their way of dismissing him. Not knowing what else to do, Harry went into his cupboard and laid down on the mattress deep in thought.

Harry was able to go to Hogwarts in the morning. The only problem was he had no way to get there.

~*~

Several hours later Lexi entered the cupboard. Harry was attempting to fake being sleep. She knew there was just no way he would want to reexamine his conversation with their aunt and uncle with her. But unfortunately for Harry, Lexi knew him too well, and knew when he was faking it.

"Harry," Lexi hissed as she poked him in the shoulder. "Open your eyes you big faker."

"Lexi, please just leave me alone." Harry said in a dreary voice.

"No, not until we figure out how you're going to Kings Cross tomorrow," Lexi tempted him.

Sure enough Harry cracked open an eye to look at her. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you can go to Hogwarts, the Dursleys practically gave you their blessing!" Lexi decided the more outlandish she was the more receptive Harry would be to her next idea. "All we have to do is figure out the bus schedule in the morning to get you to London, then from there to Kings Cross."

"Lexi, I've already thought of that." Harry responded. "I don't have any money, therefore the bus is out."

Lexi let out a reluctant sigh, it pained her to say what she was about to say, but it was the right thing to do. "You do have money Harry."

Harry scoffed at her last statement. "No, I don't."

“Yes you do.” Lexi said, while grabbing on to Harry’s hands, not able to meet his eyes. “You have the money you saved up to buy me a dress from my birthday. I want you to use it to get to Kings Cross.”

“Lexi, I can’t.” Harry said, sorrow lacing his voice.

“It’s the only way.” Lexi said resound in her decision, even though tears were welling up in her eyes. “Take the money, I want you to use it Harry. That’s all I want for my birthday. Go to Kings Cross, go to Hogwarts.” She would not let him see she was about to cry.

“Thank you,” came the whispered response from Harry. With that all the fight left Lexi and she collapsed on the mattress next to him.

“I’m going to have to get up early to figure out this bus schedule thing.” Harry said after a few minutes of silence.

“I know,” was Lexi’s simple response.

“This is our last night together for a long time.” Harry said softly.

“I know,” Lexi choked out.

“I’m going to miss you.” Harry said in a very quiet whisper.

“Me too,” She replied, as she hugged Harry as hard as she could.

After a second period of silence Harry spoke once more. “Aunt Petunia said magic killed our parents.” The worry was evident in his voice.

“Aunt Petunia says a lot of things. That doesn’t make them true.” Lexi stubbornly replied.

“But what if it is true?” Harry asked.

“I don’t know Harry.” Lexi sleepily responded. “But we’re Potters; we’ll figure it together.”

~*~

A/N: Alright, so hopefully this chapter answered some questions in regards to whether or not Lexi would be going to Hogwarts with Harry. I'm sorry, I would have loved to send her sooner, but she is just too young. However, I must note year three will be quite exciting since she will be there.

Also, a side note (for reviewers such as Picky) if you sign your review I will answer any questions in it as soon as possible. As for who Lexi will end up with... I think I'll keep that info under my hat for a little bit. Once she gets to Hogwarts it may be obvious who she was meant to be with. And thanks Picky for the long review!

A huge 'Thank you' to everyone who reviewed. Like I said in the disclaimer, the reviews made me write a lot of this story the past week as my wonderful friend and beta zephy-mama will confirm. A lot of interesting twists are in store for the future. And perhaps I'll be updating this later this week. ;)

Till next time! Foria

Next Chapter: Just Harry

Chapter 4 Just Harry

"Wake up you freaks!" The shrill voice of Petunia Dursley called through the cupboard door. "It's seven am and breakfast hasn't been started yet!"

Lexi jumped out of bed as quickly as she could. It was hard to believe that she was able to fall asleep after Harry left earlier that morning, but her sheer exhaustion must have caught up with her.

"I'm up!" Lexi called through the door as Aunt Petunia banged on it again. "I'm up!"

"What about the boy?" Aunt Petunia asked as Lexi dressed on the other side of the door.

Lexi was a bit taken aback. Of course Aunt Petunia should know that today Harry left for Hogwarts, like they had talked to Harry about the night before.

"Aunt Petunia," Lexi said when she exited the cupboard. "Harry went to Hogwarts today."

Aunt Petunia hissed upon hearing the word 'Hogwarts' and stomped away with a displeased look on her face. Sighing, Lexi just knew it was going to be a long time without Harry.

~*~

Harry Potter had a wild day, and it wasn't even eleven in the morning. He woke at the crack of dawn to prepare for his journey to Hogwarts. After a long and tearful goodbye with Lexi, Harry walked out of the Dursley home, and everything he had ever known; 'to learn the family business' as Lexi had said. Hogwarts was to be his great adventure, and getting there was merely the first part of his journey.

Harry sat at the bus stop on the corner of Magnolia Crescent for what seemed like hours waiting for one that would take him to London. While Harry was aware that Kings Cross station was merely an hour

and half away from Privet Drive by car, Harry did not know the bus schedule so he made sure he was there several hours early.

After taking the Magnolia Crescent bus to the bus terminal for Surrey, Harry had barely enough money to purchase a ticket on a bus to his desired destination. Being seen as a freak for most of his life, Harry was used to people staring at him and giving him weird looks. Harry realized a small, young boy, traveling alone by bus to London would get strange looks, so he thought nothing of it. It was almost normal for Harry.

Waiting at the bus terminal for nearly two hours, Harry was finally able to take a bus that would get him not just to London but to Kings Cross Station in particular. It didn't help that he nearly missed the bus due to the driver's reluctance to take a young boy unaccompanied by an adult. But eventually it was straightened out since Harry had a ticket and the driver could not break company policy by denying him a seat. Although the station manager did warn Harry that he needed to be on his best behavior or he would be forced off the bus regardless of whether or not it was the correct stop.

The trip to the train station was a long and unnerving ride between the glares he received from the bus driver and his own conflicted thoughts about Hogwarts. Even though Lexi was convinced Hogwarts would not turn Harry away, he was not so confident. The thought of having to return to the Dursleys after his less than pleasant farewell was not appealing to Harry.

Yet at ten thirty am Harry finally arrived at Kings Cross Station with his train ticket to go to Hogwarts. The only problem was he was unable to find the platform listed on his ticket. According to the ticket Harry was to meet the Hogwarts Express at precisely eleven am on platform nine and three quarters, but there appeared to be no such platform.

Harry wondered at first if his ticket was simply misprinted, since the security guard at the station had never heard of the Hogwarts Express and thought Harry was simply pulling his leg. After his first encounter, Harry concluded the station staff would be no assistance

to him in quest. This would be his first test on his journey to becoming the best wizard he could be.

Harry began roaming up and down the terminals near platform nine looking for any sign or clue of the wizarding world. Yet, not knowing a lot about the wizarding world in general, Harry was unsure what he should be looking for. The only things Harry knew for sure were that the magical school was called Hogwarts, and that the wizarding world used owls to carry their mail.

At ten forty five am Harry was hopelessly looking up and down the terminal and was ready to admit defeat when he saw the thing that would change his life forever. There was a redheaded family rushing down the terminal with an owl on their trolley.

Harry nearly jumped for joy; after tightening the straps of his rucksack Harry rushed over to them and began following the redheaded family in hopes that they would lead him to the Hogwarts Express. It was the only chance Harry had left.

"Packed with muggles," the mother began while shaking her head. "What is the name of the platform for Hogwarts again?"

"Nine and three quarters, Mum" piped up the littlest of the redheads. She was a little girl with fiery red hair that was nothing like Lexi's hair before it magically changed. Lexi's was a lot darker where this young girl's hair reminded Harry of fire.

"Alright, here we are, Percy you first." The mother said while standing in front of a pillar between platforms nine and ten.

Harry was completely flabbergasted when he saw the eldest looking boy, with the owl on his trolley, ran at the pillar and disappeared into it. Harry just stood there staring at the pillar with a dumbfounded look on his face as he watched each of the boys run into the pillar followed by the mother and the little girl.

Staring at the pillar for a few more minutes after all the redheads were gone, Harry grabbed forth all his courage and copied the actions of the redheaded family. Mentally preparing himself to crash

into the stone pillar Harry was surprised to find himself standing on a platform with a large red steam engine at the dock when he finally opened his eyes.

Harry's breath was taken away. Even though he and Lexi had carefully planned his escape to Hogwarts, there was a part of him that never dreamed it would really happen. Now he couldn't doubt it would happen. He was faced with the reality. He was going to Hogwarts on the Hogwarts Express, the school his parents went to and he was far away from the Dursleys. The only down side was that Lexi was going to have to wait to join him.

Sucking in a deep breath, and setting back his shoulders, Harry proudly made his way on to the Hogwarts Express. This was his time and he was determined to be the best wizard he could be to make Lexi proud of him.

~*~

After Harry bumbled in loading his trunk onto the luggage cart, Harry boarded the train and found a compartment to himself near the caboose. There were tons of people milling around the corridors of the train and Harry was a bit intimidated by the sheer number of people.

Nowhere in Harry's wildest dreams would he imagine that there were such a large number of witches and wizards in the world, let alone who would all go to one school. How did he not know about the wizarding world earlier? Especially after all the weird things he and Lexi had done.

"Mind if I sit here?" the voice of one of the redheaded boys interrupted Harry's thoughts. "Everywhere else is full."

"No, feel free to sit down," Harry nervously answered. What was he supposed to do? No one ever wanted to sit with him at his primary school!

"Name is Ron," the boy said reaching out his hand towards Harry.

"Harry," Harry replied as he took the other boy's hand and shook it; alright, so far so good.

"Are you that famous Harry?" Ron asked with a bit of wonder in his voice.

"No," Harry immediately replied, his face scrunching up in confusion. "Sorry, I'm just Harry; no one special."

"Oh," Ron replied a bit deflated. "I heard the Boy-Who-Lived was coming to Hogwarts this year. His name is Harry too."

Harry just nodded his head in strained interest. He could care less about some famous person.

The only thing Harry was interested in or concerned with was learning more about the magical world. That way he wouldn't so lost or confused once he made it to Hogwarts.

Ron pulled something gray and fat out of his pocket. On closer inspection Harry noticed that it was an extremely fat and balding rat, that almost seemed to be shaking in fear.

"What's that?" Harry asked wondering why the other boy had a rat in his pocket.

"Oh, this is Scabbers," Ron quickly replied. "He's my pet rat. Well, he was Percy's rat first but when he was made prefect, Mum and Dad bought him an owl and I got Scabbers."

The rat definitely looked a bit old and sick in Harry's opinion but he didn't want the other boy to feel bad about his pet.

"He seems nice," Harry replied.

"Nah," Ron said dismissively, "Scabbers has been put through the ringer by my older twin brothers. They are always pulling pranks and testing weird things on animals. Poor Scabbers here has been their favorite test subject."

Harry just raised his eyebrows at Ron's last statement. Ron's brothers didn't seem to be anyone that Harry wanted to cross.

"Do you have a pet?" Ron asked Harry after a few minutes.

"No," Harry quickly replied a bit self-conscious of his lack of material possessions. How was Harry supposed to tell people about not having anything? No personal possessions to speak of, no clothing and especially no magic wand.

Harry's heart began to race as he thought about the consciences of his actions. He left Privet Drive with basically nothing, going to a magic school and hoping for the best. What if they turned him away? Would Aunt Petunia let him back into her home? What would Lexi do if he could never return to her?

~*~

The ride to Hogwarts had initially been uneventful. Ron turned out to be a wealth of information about the wizarding world in general. His whole family was witches and wizards and he lived his whole life knowing about magic.

From Ron, Harry learned that the wizarding world hid itself away from the "muggle" world, better known as the non-magical world. A long time ago when witches and wizards were persecuted by muggles, it was decided that the safest thing for all magical beings was to be hidden from the muggle world. Harry found this very fascinating especially since if it were not for his Hogwarts' letter, he would never had learned about the wizarding world at all.

According to Ron, there were three types of witches and wizards. There were purebloods, like Ron whose whole family was composed of witches and wizards for generations. Half-bloods were witches and wizards who had one parent that was a pureblood and the other was either a muggle or a muggleborn witch or wizard. The last type of wizard was a muggleborn, which Ron said Harry was. That was a wizard or witch who was born to muggles and raised in the muggle world until they got their Hogwarts' letter.

While Harry believed his parents were a witch and a wizard due to his aunt's words the previous evening, Harry did not know for sure. Harry could only guess as to what he may actually be or what his parents were. He just wished there was some way to learn more about his family, since it seemed from Aunt Petunia that they had been a part of the wizarding world.

Also from Ron, Harry was able to learn a lot about Hogwarts. Ron was one of seven children and had five older brothers that either attended Hogwarts or already graduated from it. He was able to give Harry some information about the professors and setup of the school. Most of the professors were rather fair and balanced, except for Professor Snape who taught potions. He hated all students that were not members of his house.

Hogwarts was divided into four school houses, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin, into which students were sorted, based on how brave, loyal, smart or evil they were. Each house had a different teacher that was their head of house and was responsible for this students and their welfare while they were at Hogwarts.

The minute Ron mentioned the concept behind the heads of house; Harry felt some of his worry and nervousness seep away from him. If these professors were responsible for the welfare of their students then it was quite possible that Harry's head of house would be able to assist him in gathering the supplies that he needed for school.

Harry was extremely grateful for all the information Ron was able to share with him since it gave him a good idea about what to expect when he arrived at Hogwarts and about the wizarding world in general. Unfortunately, nothing Ron could have said or done would have prepared Harry for what happened next.

While the two boys were sharing Ron's corned beef sandwiches, due to the fact that Harry did not know how long the train ride to Hogwarts was and had not packed any food to eat, a young witch entered their compartment.

"Has anyone seen a toad?" the young witch asked. "A boy by the name of Neville has lost one."

“Sorry,” Ron replied. “Haven’t seen one, but if I had one I’d try to lose it. Toads aren’t the coolest pets to have.”

The witch had apparently taken offense to Ron’s comment since she immediately snapped, “Is that your rat?” At Ron’s nod, she continued, “then you’re one to talk, rats aren’t even on the Hogwarts’ approved list of pets.”

“Now wait a minute,” Ron began to argue back, but luckily for all involved, Harry interrupted.

“I’m sure Ron didn’t mean to offend you, Miss?” Harry asked with a pleading look on his face since the witch did not tell him her name.

“Hermione Granger,” the witch automatically responded. “And you are?”

“Harry Potter,” Harry said while holding out his hand to shake hers. However at the same moment Harry said his name, Ron let out a curse word while Hermione sucked in her breath.

“You’re the Harry Potter?” Hermione asked extremely rapidly. “As in the Harry Potter that defeated the dark wizard,” continued Hermione without allowing Harry a chance to respond. “Lord Voldemort I believe his name was. I read all about you in Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century.”

“Blimey, Harry why didn’t you tell me you were the Harry Potter?” Ron asked with a disgusted look on his face. “I even asked you if you were him and you said no! Why did you let me prattle on the fool about stuff you already knew?”

Harry for his part was completely dumbfounded. He didn’t know how to react to what Hermione and Ron were saying.

“What are you both talking about?” Harry asked the confusion evident in his tone.

"You're a real prat if you think you can play me like that again." Ron said while standing up with Scabbers and marching out the door.

"That wasn't very nice." Hermione said with narrowing eyes. "Pretending you didn't know who you are."

"Honestly Hermione, I don't know what you are talking about." Harry said in a pleading tone.

Hermione merely huffed in disgust and stomped out of the room as well, leaving Harry once again all alone. Harry banged his head against the cool glass of the window of the train. He really thought that Ron may be his first friend, but that wasn't meant to be. He really wished he knew what Ron and Hermione were talking about.

Harry was left on his own for an hour before the compartment door swung open again. When it first opened Harry had hoped that it was either Ron or Hermione coming back to apologize once they realized they had mistaken Harry for someone else. However, rather quickly Harry realized the person who opened the compartment door was not a potential friend, but something else entirely.

"I heard on the train that the Harry Potter was in this compartment," a snide voice called out.

Harry thought the grand show this blond haired boy was making was rather pointless considering he was the only person currently occupying the compartment. This boy obviously had Harry confused with someone else just as Ron did earlier.

"I'm sorry," Harry said after making a quick decision. "You've been misinformed. I'm just Harry; nobody famous and nobody important."

"I should hope you're not," the blond hair boy said as his face curled up in a sneer. "There is no way the Boy-Who-Lived would look as dreadful and trashy as you."

Without giving his name, the boy and two other boys who looked like miniature apes, that Harry finally noticed went stomping out of the

compartment. Harry sighed as he realized that while he may have escaped the Dursleys; there were people like Dudley everywhere.

~*~

"Stupid Lexi Potter is all by her little self," the nasal tones of Dudley Dursley rang from behind Lexi as she weeded out the flowerbed.

Aunt Petunia was off her game today, so she didn't assign Lexi any chores. But Lexi knew if it wasn't done today it would be worse when she had to do it the next day with dozen of other things Aunt Petunia assigned her.

"Poor stupid Lexi Potter," Dudley continued to sing to himself.

"Don't you have anything better to do?" Lexi asked barely able to contain her anger. "Do you have brainless followers to order around or something? Or perhaps you should pack for school; don't you leave for term tomorrow?"

"No you stupid bint," Dudley said, his irritation at her words evident in his tone. "I don't leave for another three days, and the guys are shopping for their school supplies. Mum already got me mine."

"My mistake," Lexi said continuing with her weeding. When Dudley continued to stare at her while she weeded, Lexi began to get nervous. Dudley wouldn't dare do something to her in the yard would he? Aunt Petunia would be furious if he did considering the neighbors might see him beating her up.

"Are you just going to stare at me all day?" Lexi finally asked unable to take the continuous stares.

"He can't protect you from me anymore," Dudley calmly replied. "Harry is gone and we're gonna have some fun with you."

Lexi silently vowed to herself when Dudley walked away that she would not leave the Dursleys' home until after Dudley went off to school. It was only three days. There wasn't much he could do to her in that time, right?

~*~

The rest of Harry's train ride was spent in silence while Harry battled within himself about whether or not he made the right decision in coming to Hogwarts. If Harry was truthful with himself, he would have realized that he was constantly reflecting back upon his decision since he made it. He was uncomfortable in going against what he was used to and what he had known. Especially Harry was upset with parting from Lexi. For as long as he remembered, Lexi was the only person who loved him, who cared about him, and who depended on him. He felt he was being selfish by going off to Hogwarts on some great adventure, only to leave her behind.

"We have now arrived at Hogsmead station," a loud voice came out of nowhere. Harry had not seen a P.A. system or speakers anywhere on the train. "Please leave all your luggage and pets on the train, while exiting from the nearest and safest exit. Windows are not considered the safest exit on this train. Please use the doors."

From somewhere down the train car, Harry could hear twin voices complaining and whining at the conductor's last statement. Even in Harry's down mood he couldn't help but laugh at the antics of the other students.

"Thank you for riding the Hogwarts Express," the disembodied voice continued. "Enjoy your school year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

A large rumble came across the Hogwarts Express. Initially alarmed, Harry belatedly realized the noise he was hearing were all the other students exiting their compartments. Grabbing his ruckus, even though the conductor asked him to leave it on the train, Harry opened his compartment door, to feel as if he had entered the past.

All the other students were wearing very stiff looking robes over a very formal school uniform. Harry nearly ran back into his compartment when he realized that he stuck out like a sore thumb. Keeping his head down, to prevent making eye contact with anyone else or to see the other student's disgusted faces, Harry rushed out of

the nearest car exit; Only to have Harry collide with what felt like a solid brick wall.

With no other option Harry pick himself off the ground and looked at what he collided with. It was really wasn't a what, but a who, Harry had collided with. Looking up, Harry had to crane his neck to look at the face of the man he had run into.

"You need to watch w'ere ya gonin'" the man said as Harry continued to look up at him in wonder. "Goodness," the man admonished. "W'ere is ya're uniform?"

"I'm sorry," Harry stammered. "I don't-"

But before Harry could continue he was cut off. "Of 'ourse ya don't have time to change naw. Yo're must be a firsty, fo'ow me to the boats."

Harry, not really understanding what the man had been saying, did as he prompted and followed the man, with several other children his age, to a series of boats.

"'our to a boat," the man called and all the children climbed on to the boats. Harry hesitated and the man once again prompted Harry, but this time it was to join the man on his boat.

Since there was no one moving the oars on the boat, so Harry believed it must be magic. As the boats, moved across the lake and around a bend, Harry caught a glimpse of the most beautiful sight of his life. A large ancient looking castle, all lit up stood out in the distance, under the full moon. To Harry there was nothing more glorious, or magical that he had ever seen in his life.

"Beautiful aint it," asked the giant of a man, as he turned his gaze towards Harry.

All Harry could do was nod in agreement. Staring at the castle, he realized he did it. Harry Potter had made it to Hogwarts. He would give anything in the world to have Lexi sitting next to him at that very moment.

~*~

Once they reached an in cove around the base of the castle, all of the children exited the boats, and followed the giant of a man up the steps and into the room. The man held Harry back to wait at the doorway while all the other children followed the man into the room. A few minutes later, the man returned with a stern older witch wearing emerald robes.

"ere he is, Professor McGonagall," the man said. "I thought perhaps you could help him."

"Dear me," the woman said in a thick Scottish brogue. "What happened to you Mr.?"

"Potter," Harry quickly supplied. "Harry Potter."

But before Harry could continue Professor McGonagall let out a hiss while the man was yelling about Merlin's saggy balls.

"Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall basically yelled. "What is the meaning of this? Where are your school robes?"

"I'm sorry; I was unable to purchase any robes as well as any school supplies." Harry said as quickly as he could without stuttering, as he pulled his Hogwarts letter out of his pocket. His cheeks were turning red with shame. "I really wanted to but I was unable to—"

"Oh my!" Professor McGonagall startled voice interrupted Harry. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Potter, this was entirely my fault. I thought when you had no problems receiving and replying to your Hogwarts' letter that you would have no problems with accessing the magical world."

Harry just stared at her. The professor thought his lack of school supplies was a result of her negligence rather than the Dursleys' unreasonable behavior. He couldn't let his future professor think this was her fault in anyway.

"But professor, I don't have any money!" Harry quickly yelled to dispel Professor McGonagall's blame. "But I did receive a letter! I do belong here, even if I don't have any supplies."

"Of course you wouldn't," McGonagall replied. "If your aunt and uncle had no means to access Diagon Alley, how would they convert muggle money to wizarding currency? I'll have to ask Professor Dumbledore if there is some way for you to access your parents' vault."

Harry gaping at the professor was definitely suffering from an information overload. Who was this Professor Dumbledore and why would this man have the means to access anything that belonged to Harry?

"Goodness," Professor McGonagall said after glancing at her watch. "The sorting should start any minute. We need to get you presentable to meet your peers."

Suddenly, the professor pulled a wooden stick out of her sleeve and gave it a swish. Harry's baggy pants and grey shirt had been turned into a perfect replica of a Hogwarts uniform.

"My clothing!" Harry cried out in distress. His birthday shirt was gone! What did she do to his present from Lexi?

"Don't be alarmed Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall said in her no nonsense tone of voice. "This is merely a simple transfiguration. The articles of clothing will transform back into their original form overnight tonight." Seeing Harry's disbelieving look she continued, "You have my word on that as a Hogwarts' professor."

Harry reluctantly dropped the issue; vowing to bring it back up if his grey shirt was not returned to its proper form in the morning.

"Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Hagrid," the woman stiffly said.

“Yo’re welcome pro’essor,” the giant man called Hagrid responded before turning to Harry. “I’ve’n’t seen ya since you were a babe ‘arry. It was good to see ya again.”

Harry meekly nodded before the large man lumbered though the door and out of sight.

“Come along Mr. Potter.” Professor McGonagall said in a no nonsense tone of voice. “You may have missed my welcoming to Hogwarts, but you don’t want to be late for your own sorting.”

At once Harry followed the stern professor out the door and to the hall holding his fellow students. Harry quickly slid into the back of the room as quietly as he could. Years of trying to be hidden from the Dursleys came in handy as it seemed that nobody noticed his entrance.

“Move along now,” the sharp voice of Professor McGonagall echoed across the room which immediately began to quiet down. “The Sorting Ceremony’s about to start. Form a line,” Professor McGonagall said as she gestured to the spot where she wanted them to start lining up, “And follow me.”

All of the students moved as one to line up for the Sorting Ceremony. As Harry moved to enter the line he caught a glare from Ron. Harry just sighed, things were moving way too fast from him and he didn’t know how to slow it down any.

Once the line was formed, Professor McGonagall led the first year students into the hall where the rest of the school population was waiting. As the first years walked into the hall, Harry couldn’t help but overhear the other students’ speculation over what the sorting process entailed. There was so much going on for Harry that he had not even considered anything about his life at Hogwarts. He had been taking everything minute by minute.

Looking around the hall, Harry realized that Hogwarts was a lot larger than he had anticipated on the train. There were four tables laid out along the length of the room. Each of the different tables had banners with different symbols on them hanging over the tables. Harry quickly

realized that those different logos must represent the different houses within Hogwarts; and that the students sitting at the different tables must be members of the particular house they sat under.

An old hat was placed on a stool in the middle of the room by Professor McGonagall. Before Harry knew it, the hat sprung to life and began singing a song about the different houses at Hogwarts. Harry was quite relieved to learn that the sorting consisted of placing a hat on his head and having it decide where you should go to spend the rest of the year.

Once the hat concluded, Professor McGonagall called students forward one by one to be sorted into different houses. Hermione Granger was the first name Harry recognized and she was sorted into Gryffindor, so was the boy she mentioned on the train: Neville Longbottom. The pale blond haired boy, whose name was Draco Malfoy, was sorted into Slytherin house. Harry really never considered which house he wanted to be sorted into. But one thing Harry did know for sure was that he wanted to be as far away from Draco Malfoy as possible.

Before long, Professor McGonagall called out the name "Potter, Harry" and the whole room broke out into whispers. Harry looked around for some other boy by the name of Harry Potter, yet he didn't see anyone. Realizing he was the only Harry Potter, he stepped forward to the sorting hat and placed it on his head.

"Ah, the legendary Harry Potter," a voice said in his head. "I thought I'd be seeing you this year."

A cold chill spread down Harry's spine. This was not what he was expecting.

"I'm not sure what you mean, I'm just Harry." Harry thought back to the hat.

"Just Harry," the hat questioned. "You're the savior of the wizarding world. How could you ever be just Harry?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Harry was basically screaming at the hat now. "I didn't even know I was a wizard until a few weeks ago!"

"By Merlin!" The hat exclaimed. "I would never believe you wouldn't even know your own story if I wasn't able to see inside your head."

"What story?" Harry prompted. He was determined to know why everyone acted so weird around him.

"Well, I'm not sure if I'm the one who should be telling you," the hat began. "But it all started with a dark wizard who was known throughout the world as Lord Voldemort..."

~*~

A/N: Once again a chapter has come to an end. Let me please thank everyone that has reviewed, and to zephy for being a wonderful beta. Every comment has been greatly welcomed; positive comments and criticism alike. Let me make a special shout out to swanpride and passionismywriting for their indept questions that really made me reflect whether or not certain points were clear enough in the story. I believe this story is a bit better for the them making me think more about certain points!

Just in general, remember these kids range between eleven (Harry, Ron, and Hermione) and nine (Lexi). Somethings may seem stupid or a bit immature or not clearly thought through but for the most part that was intentional on my part since they are kids and not perfect. Harry not arriving with school supplies for Hogwarts is an example of that. He is embarassed to admit the Dursleys won't provide it for him and Lexi seemed to think everything would work out, so he will too simply because he wants that to happen.

Please remember, if you leave me a review I will attempt to reply to you (if it's signed). Picky, I would be flattered if you logged in to review for my story. ;) As for what Dumbledore is like, what the Weasleys will do, and the wizarding world's reaction to Lexi... that would be spoiling the story. You'll have to just wait and see. Most of

your questions should be answered fairly quickly and the one that isn't will be answered by the end of year two.

I know people are not going to like Ron and Hermione's reaction earlier in the chapter. Remember they are just kids and all will eventually be well, it just might take a while for one person in particular. I guess I just gave you all a spoiler of things to come. Better stop while I'm still relatively tight lipped!

Foria

Next Chapter: Welcome to the Wizarding World

Chapter 5: Welcome to the Wizarding World

“Well, I’m not sure if I’m the one who should be telling you,” the hat began. “But it all started with a dark wizard who was known throughout the world as Lord Voldemort. He was corrupted by the power that is associated with the Dark Arts, and did many terrible things in his quest to gain more power. He held many radical beliefs, one of which was that pureblooded wizards and witches were far superior to their muggleborn counterparts. His followers were brutal and attacked and killed many muggles and muggleborn people simply because of their roots.

“Eventually the wizarding world was divided into two different sides, those who followed Voldemort and those who sided with Headmaster Dumbledore against Voldemort. Your parents were among the people who fought against Lord Voldemort under the guidance of the Headmaster.”

“That doesn’t explain why everyone knows me,” Harry said after the hat was silent for what felt like several minutes.

“No,” the hat replied. “I suppose not. I’m not sure how to tell you this Harry, but for whatever reason Voldemort targeted your family and attempted to kill you all. However, he didn’t succeed. While your parents perished, you survived and broke all the laws of magic.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked, confused as to what the hat was referring.

“The scar on your forehead is no ordinary scar,” the hat continued, not missing a beat. “It is a curse scar that you received when you were hit with the killing curse.” The hat paused as if gathering its thoughts. “You see Harry; the killing curse is called the killing curse because it always instantly kills its victims. No one, other than you, has ever survived being hit by the killing curse. That is what makes you so special, so different from everyone else.”

Harry just sat there in stunned silence. He was different from everyone else.

"What about Lexi?" Harry asked suddenly concerned with her well being. "What about my sister?"

"Sister?" the hat repeated in shock. "You have a sister?"

"Yes," Harry replied slowly, hope glimmering in him, that perhaps the hat had the wrong Harry. "My sister Lexi, what about her?"

"I, I," the hat began to stutter. "I was unaware you had a sister, but I can see her in your mind. I do know she was not there that night, the night your parents died." The hat clarified. "I highly doubt many people in the wizarding world know of her existence if I didn't even know about it."

"Why do you say that?" Harry asked.

"I reside in the Headmaster's office," the hat said the pride evident in his voice. "The Headmaster learns of everything, which I may or may not over hear in my position as a resident of his noble office."

"So everything you learn about the students, you relay back to him?" Harry asked, truly interested in how much the Headmaster learned about his students.

"Merlin, no!" The hat exclaimed, a chuckle in his voice. "Everything said by a student remains completely confidential. It wouldn't be fair otherwise considering I can see right into your mind. Now, now," the hat said, picking up on Harry's racing thoughts. "We are here to sort you into your proper school house, why don't we focus on that?"

Harry couldn't help but agree as the hat began muttering to itself.

"Now let's see, you've got a strong mind, and you're loyal to the core." The hat began, as he analyzed Harry's personality. "You are rather cunning, you'd have to be growing up the way you did, but then again you're brave to a fault. Any of the houses would suit you, but where would you do your best?"

"Where were my parents sorted?" Harry asked, genuinely interested in where his parents were.

“Considering that is public knowledge, I am free to divulge it,” the hat stated. “Your parents, Lily and James were both sorted into Gryffindor.”

“I would like to go there,” Harry said, although the hat had never asked.

“But why?” The hat inquired. “Just because your parents were in that house, doesn’t mean it is the one that is suited for you.”

“I have nothing that connects me to my parents,” Harry said shyly. “Being in the same house as them would connect me to them.”

“But they are your parents.” The hat said. “You’re always connected to them; you came from them.”

“That’s all fine and good,” Harry replied. “But I want something more.”

“Fine,” the hat said definitively. “I can tell there will be no changing your mind. Then you shall go to GRYFFINDOR!” The last word was called out loud, so that everyone in the Great Hall could hear it.

Yet, while all the other students received applause for their sorting, Harry’s was only greeted to silence. Harry awkwardly stood up, and placed the hat back on the stool. Without glancing at anyone in particular, Harry walked quickly to the Gryffindor table while all the other students started whispering to one another.

“That had to be the longest sorting ever,” said a curly haired girl sitting at the Ravenclaw table.

“What would cause the hat to take so long?” asked a brown haired boy who was sitting near the end of the Gryffindor table.

Harry could tell that most of the conversations around the Great Hall centered on his sorting ceremony. The eyes staring at him, even after he sat down, and the whispers of his name were all that it took for him to know the truth. Harry sighed, as he stared at the empty plate in front of him. Even in the magical world, he was some sort of a freak.

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“Mr. Potter,” the brisk voice of Professor McGonagall startled Harry causing him to drop his fork onto his plate.

Truth be told, the Hogwarts’ start-of-term feast was like nothing Harry had ever experienced before. While Harry frequently cooked meals and feasts for the Dursleys, he had never had the opportunity to partake in those meals. Harry had never experienced anything with such a wide range and amount of food before in his life. The fact that he was actually allowed to participate in eating it was simply incomprehensible.

The food alone had to have cost a fortune not to mention the fees for the people who had to prepare such a large meal. Harry was simply stunned at the large production that Hogwarts put on for its students.

And the students were an entirely different matter that Harry didn’t understand. Not only did they stare at him as if he had a deficiency, but they were constantly whispering about him. He was right there, next to them in some cases; he had ears and was well aware at what they were saying. Yet, it didn’t seem to matter for the students of Hogwarts; while no one directly talked to Harry, they just continued to talk about him as if he wasn’t there.

“I had an opportunity to speak with the headmaster,” the stern professor continued, not missing a beat. “He and I both agree that you need to go to Diagon Alley at the earliest possible moment. Therefore, you will be excused from your first two lessons tomorrow morning to go fetch the items you need for school, with a staff member who has the morning free.”

At this point it seemed to Harry as if the whole Gryffindor table was staring at the two of them.

“Oh, and well done Mr. Potter on becoming a Gryffindor,” Professor McGonagall said, before she swept up the aisle to the staff table once again.

Harry didn't even realize till later that throughout his entire conversation with his Head of House, he did not even say a word.

A few minutes later the feast was called to a close, as all the plates and left over food disappeared from the table. The Headmaster of the school stood up and addressed the student population.

"Ahem – just a few words now that we are all fed and watered," the aged man said. "I have a few start-of-term notices to give you.

"First-years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled in the direction of the Gryffindor table.

"I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that magic should be used between classes in the corridors." The Headmaster continued as Harry could hear students audibly snickering at his last request.

"Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in joining their house teams should contact Madam Hooch." Professor Dumbledore gestured towards a woman with hawk like eyes at the end of the staff table.

"And finally, I must tell you that this year; the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

"He must be joking," Harry heard Ron's voice echo from down the table.

"No, he must be serious," an older boy said, frowning at Dumbledore.

"And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!" cried Dumbledore. As he gave his wand a flick, a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted like a snake into words. The rest of the staff table had looks of pain on their faces, yet they still maintained their smiles.

"Everyone pick their favorite tune," said Dumbledore, "and off we go!"

Once the school finished the song, everyone was ordered to head to bed. The school term was about to start the next morning, regardless of when they went to bed. At that time, an older Gryffindor student, who looked a lot like Ron, approached the first-years.

"Welcome to Gryffindor," the boy said. "My name is Percy Weasley, and I am your fifth-year Gryffindor prefect. If you will please follow me and my female counter part, we shall lead you to the Gryffindor tower and your dormitories for the next year."

Percy quickly turned away and started to lead the first-years out of the Great Hall before the blond girl next to him even had the opportunity to get a word out. The witch looked a bit downcast as she turned towards the group of first-years, and gestured for them to follow the red-haired boy.

Harry, however, just stared at the mass of students moving around him. He could not believe how many magical students there were since the magical world was kept hidden from the muggle world. Harry couldn't wait to tell Lexi all about it.

The thought of his sister made a sharp pain begin in Harry's chest. He loved Lexi so much, and missed her already. Harry had never been away from her in his entire life. This was the first time they had ever been separated, and Harry was unsure how to handle it.

"We really need to be heading to the dormitory," a kind voice broke through Harry's thoughts. Harry turned to see the blond haired girl, who had stood next to Percy Weasley smiling at him.

"I'm sorry," Harry mumbled.

"Oh don't worry," the girl said with a laugh in her tone. "I still remember my first day at Hogwarts; it can be a bit overwhelming. Missing your family, being away from home, in a foreign place that is so different from what you know."

Harry just stared at the girl in disbelief; she had basically read his mind.

"I'm Audrey," the girl said holding out her hand, "the other fifth-year perfect."

"Harry," Harry replied while taking her hand to shake.

"Come on," Audrey said. "We don't want to be shut in here for the night." And with that, Harry followed the girl out of the room.

As Harry followed Audrey around the twist and turns of the castle, he vaguely realized that he was felt extremely tired. All the excitement of the day had finally caught up with him. Harry realized that it may take several days for everything he learned in the last forty-eight hours to finally sink in. But at least now he knew the truth about himself.

"Caput Draconis," Audrey said as she stopped in front of a portrait of a fat lady wearing a pink dress.

With that the portrait swung open to reveal a large room filled with tables and chairs against the wall and large overstuffed chairs and couches scattered across the room. The entire room was decorated solely in red and gold.

"The portrait we just stopped in front of is the guardian for Gryffindor tower," Audrey began. "You need a password to enter our common room at all times. The password I gave will be valid for the next month. The new password will be posted on the notice board a week before it goes into effect." Audrey gestured to the poster board on the wall in question. "Only Gryffindors will know the password, and telling any student outside our house is a punishable offense.

"The stairways right there," Audrey continued, pointing to two spiraling staircases, "lead to the boys and girls dormitories. The boys are on the left and the girls are on the right. The first year boys' dorm should be on the top floor. Oh, and before I forget; only girls can go up the girl staircase or an alarm will sound."

"What about the boys' staircase?" Harry enquired.

"The founders of Hogwarts trusted girls more than boys." Audrey said with a shrug. "Girls are permitted to go up into the boys' dormitory, but you'd be hard pressed to actually get a girl to do so."

"Well Harry," Audrey sighed. "It's about time you headed to bed. You'll have an exciting day ahead of you tomorrow."

"Thanks Audrey," Harry said shyly.

"Don't mention it Harry," the girl said with a smile. "If you have any problems or questions don't hesitate to ask."

With that Audrey headed up the girl dormitory staircase, waving to Harry before he was out of sight. Harry stood firmly in his spot. That girl was very nice to him. Perhaps Hogwarts wasn't going to be as bad as he thought it was going to be.

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The night was very long for Harry Potter. All of the other Gryffindor boys were in bed before Harry made it up to his dormitory. Meaning that Harry was unable to try and talk to any of the other boys before going to bed. Then once Harry got into bed he tossed and turned all night long. Harry was so used to having Lexi sleep next to him that her absence was nearly painful. Being alone in bed reminded Harry of how alone he really was at Hogwarts; at least on Privet Drive Harry had Lexi.

Harry awoke before all of the other boys in his dorm at morning. He was used to waking up before the Dursleys to cook them their breakfast. But here at Hogwarts it seemed a bit ridiculous that he awoke so early. Perhaps being at school would allow him to experience something he had always heard about but never experienced: a lie-in.

Once he found the loo and shower, Harry went through his morning routine, spending an extra long amount of time in the shower. It felt good to have no restrictions on his bathroom time. After he finished in the bathroom, he dressed in the spare change of clothing he brought

to school with him; it was the only other semi-decent outfit he owned. Harry was extremely pleased to see his grey shirt and jeans, from the day before, had returned to their normal state, just as Professor McGonagall had promised.

Looking around at his dorm, Harry evaluated if there was anything else he needed. Deciding that there wasn't Harry left the dorm and headed down the stairs to the Gryffindor common room, to see if any other students were awake at this early hour.

As he walked into the common room, he could see the bushy hair of Hermione Granger sitting on the couch next to Audrey, the prefect who had helped him to the common room the previous evening, both of them were dressed in their Hogwarts robes. Harry looked down at his Dudley castoffs a bit self-conscious at his current appearance. As he got closer to the two girls, he could not help but overhear their conversation.

"But why would a student need to miss their first two classes of term to purchase their school supplies?" Hermione asked in a curious tone.

"I'm not sure," Audrey patiently responded.

"But-"

"Perhaps," Audrey cut off Hermione's next question. "You should ask this student yourself? As I already said, I don't know what you are talking about. Ah Harry," Audrey said quickly changing the subject upon seeing Harry. "Hermione and I were waiting for another student to join us for breakfast, are you interested?"

"Um sure," Harry responded, grateful that Audrey did not mention his lack of a Hogwarts uniform.

"Let's go," Audrey said as she stood up and walked towards the entrance way.

Hermione quickly followed Audrey, yet she made no attempt to acknowledge Harry's presence. Harry simply sighed as he followed

the two girls out of the common room. This did not bode well for him having a successful day.

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When they had made their way to the Great Hall, the three of them were the first students to arrive for breakfast. On the way through the hall Audrey explained to Harry and Hermione the easiest way to travel from Gryffindor Tower to the Great Hall. The castle was simply huge; Harry knew he would need the way explained to him a few more times.

Once they sat down at the Gryffindor table Professor McGonagall approached them in her brisk no nonsense tone.

"Mr. Potter," the stern professor began. "Once you have finished eating please come up to the head table. Professor Burbage will escort you to Diagon Alley this morning, and the two of you should leave as soon as possible. This morning you will be missing two classes, Herbology and a History of Magic. This evening you will be spending time with the professors of each of these classes to make up the work you have missed. Do you have any questions?"

"No, ma'am," was Harry's meek reply.

"Good," Professor McGonagall said with a kind smile on her face. "I'll be seeing you shortly." And with that, the professor walked away to reclaim her seat at the Head Table.

After McGonagall left, Harry attempted to concentrate on his meal; however the curious looks Hermione kept shooting his way were nearly painful. Harry was eternally grateful of Audrey's running commentary of life at Hogwarts. The fifth year prefect never paused for a second, which was probably the only reason Hermione didn't pepper him with a million different questions about his situation.

Once his meal was completed Harry bid his companions a quick goodbye before following McGonagall's instructions and going to the head table.

"Mr. Potter," began Professor McGonagall, in a stiff voice. "This is Professor Burbage, our new Muggle Studies Professor." The person his head of house indicated was a rather short woman with thick curly brown hair and bright blue eyes. "She has a free morning today and will be accompanying you to Diagon Alley. Do you have any questions?"

"No ma'am," Harry said in a soft voice. Although Harry had a million different questions, he could not speak up. The Dursleys had always taught him to never ask questions.

"Good," Professor McGonagall said with a nod. "Then the two of you better get started. The day may be young, but there are a lot of things you two will need to accomplish in a very short amount of time."

"Quite right," a musical voice agreed. "We should be going now, Mr. Potter. Is there anything you need from your dormitory?"

"No, ma'am," Harry once again replied, unable to meet Professor Burbage's eyes.

"Well, let's be on our way." The woman said with a clap of her hands. Her enthusiasm was hard to hide.

Before Harry knew what had happened he was following the excited professor out of the Great Hall and through the main doors. To where, he wasn't quite sure.

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Diagon Alley was like nothing Harry would ever imagine in his wildest dreams. Everywhere around Harry there were blatant displays of magic. If he hadn't seen the magic at Hogwarts castle the night before Harry would not have believed that anything like that was possible in his wildest dreams.

Harry and Professor Burbage had walked from the Hogwarts grounds down into the village of Hogsmead to floo from a restaurant and inn called the Three Broomsticks. While the Leaky Caldron, the establishment they had floored to, was nothing much to look at, once

they had crossed the barrier into Diagon Alley proper Harry was completely blown away.

Harry had believed that Hogsmead, the all wizarding village outside of Hogwarts was simply amazing, but it completely paled in comparison to Diagon Alley. There were shops everywhere completely devoted to the practice of magic. Harry knew that Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon ever knew that such a place existed in the heart of London, according to Professor Burbage; they would have a complete breakdown. Harry was privately concocting a plan to get Lexi to Diagon Alley at the most earliest point in time possible.

Professor Burbage was turning into a wonderful guide. Everywhere they went she would point things out to Harry and explain what it was and what it was used for. Harry felt exceedingly comfortable in her presence simply because he did not have to speak up very often; the professor was offering a running commentary that was so full of information about the magic world at large. Attempting his best impression of being a sponge, Harry was trying to soak up as much information as possible to be able to relay back to Lexi.

The first stop they made on their trip was to the wizarding bank, Gringotts. It was a snowy white building that was taller than any of the other shops around the street. Standing on either side of the solid gold door were two creatures that Professor Burbage had quietly identified as goblins. They were shorter than Harry with long fingers, pointed ears and wrinkled faces of a brownish color, with pointed beards. One look at these goblins gave Harry the impression that he did not want to be on the wrong side of these creatures.

Entering the bank Professor Burbage directed Harry to the nearest available teller. The goblin teller was currently counting gold coins that were stacked in piles on his desk. The teller did not look up from his work when they approached and Professor Burbage and Harry patiently waited for the goblin to give them his attention. After a few minutes the goblin finally stopped counting and wrote something down on a strange piece of paper.

“How can I help you?” The goblin asked while barring his sharp pointed teeth.

“Um, yes,” said a flustered Professor Burbage. “We are here to visit Harry’s vault to make a withdrawal.”

“Key?” The goblin asked in a snarling tone.

“Actually we don’t have one.” Professor Burbage said in a hesitant voice.

“No, key, no access to the vault,” the goblin said with a feral smile on his face.

“Isn’t there a way to prove ownership of a vault without actually having the key?” Professor Burbage’s voice had a desperate quality to it.

“Yes, actually there is.” The goblin replied once again smiling in a way to make a show of his pointed teeth. “If Mr. Potter would step forward it is a simple test.”

Professor Burbage gestured to Harry to step forward, and while the goblin pulled a piece of parchment out of his desk drawer. As soon as Harry was close to the desk, the goblin immediately grabbed his hand and pricked it with a pin. Harry hissed out in pain, and attempted to pull his hand back, but the goblin had a tight grip on it. The goblin squeezed Harry’s hand to force the blood that was produced at the sight of the pin prick to fall on the parchment. Once it did lines and words began to flow on the parchment and the goblin released his hand.

“Yes, this seems to be in order.” The goblin muttered while looking over the parchment. “New keys for Mr. Potter’s vaults will be made up, and the old ones will be magically destroyed. Please do not lose them this time. The next time we have to perform this test to create new keys it will be accompanied by a fee.”

“Vaults?” Professor Burbage squeaked out obviously a bit taken aback with that phrase.

“Yes,” the goblin openly sneered. “The Potter family has several vaults with us. The only one Mr. Potter has access to would be his trust fund until his seventeenth birthday at which time he will be able to collect his family inheritance.”

“Inheritance?” Now it was Harry’s turn to be caught off guard. Harry had been under the impression he would be using a public fund to pay for his school supplies. The first time Harry had heard that he had an account with this bank was when Professor Burbage began speaking with the goblin. This was something he had not been anticipating.

“Yes,” the goblin now focused his attention on Harry. “The Potter family was a very old pureblood family. Most of the old pureblood families had a lot of money and assets tied up at our establishment. Would you like us to owl you an outline of the Potter family’s current holdings with Gringotts along with a copy of your parents’ wills?”

“Yes, sir,” was Harry’s crisp response. Now that he was an open member of the magical community he wanted to know everything about himself and his family as possible. Harry was determined to never live in the dark again.

“Very good,” the goblin nodded while handing Harry several keys. “This one,” the goblin said while holding up a key, “is the key to open your trust account.”

“Thank you,” Harry replied.

“Think nothing of it.” The goblin responded with a strange smile on his face. “Griphook! Come here at once!” A second goblin ran over to their booth. “Take Mr. Potter here to his trust vault.”

“Right away, sir,” the second goblin said with a salute.

“You can wait for Mr. Potter over here,” the first goblin said to Professor Burbage while gesturing over to a stone bench. “This shouldn’t take Mr. Potter and Griphook very long.”

Professor Burbage looked as though she wanted to protest at allowing Harry to go to his trust vault alone. But instead of arguing she simply nodded her head stiffly and walked over to the place the goblin pointed to. With that Harry followed Griphook to have the ride of his life.

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After leaving the bank Harry had to admit the carts to take people to their vaults was highly entertaining. The goblin that took him, Griphook was highly amused at Harry's wonder and shared with Harry the four different fast pace speeds the cart could go. Griphook had confided in Harry that they tended to let wizards think they only go 'one speed only' since not many are fond of the fast pace of the carts. If they were always to go at the slower speed that wizards preferred they would be unable to reach the different vaults in an adequate amount of time.

Inside his vault Harry had grabbed handfuls of gold coins and placed them in a money bag that Griphook provided. Professor Burbage had explained wizarding currency to Harry on their walk from the Hogwarts gates to the Three Broomsticks, so Harry knew that the gold coins called galleons were the ones he would need the most in attempting to buy his supplies.

Once Professor Burbage and Harry finished at the bank, they went to Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions to purchase Harry his proper school uniform. While there Harry purchased a few different muggle articles of clothing as well since Professor Burbage had explained to Harry that most students tended to wear muggle clothing on the weekends.

While Harry was being fitted for his robes, Professor Burbage had collected Harry's potions materials, such as his caldron and the standard set of school ingredients, as well as picking up the stationary supplies Harry would need for term. It seemed very odd to Harry that he would need to use a quill and parchment in order to take notes and hand in assignments, but since Professor Burbage didn't seem bothered by it, Harry figured it must be considered the norm in the wizarding world.

After that, they went to Ogden's Trunks, a trunk shop to acquire a school trunk for Harry to keep all his possessions in during term. Not to mention that a trunk was easy to carry all his supplies in to and from school each term. At this point in time Professor Burbage put all of Harry's school supplies in Harry's new trunk and pulled out her wand. After muttering something and tapping the trunk with her wand, it slowly shrank to the size of a match box, and was promptly stored in Harry's pocket for the duration of their trip.

When their business was completed at Ogden's Trunks, Harry next went to the book shop to purchase all of school books for his first year. While there Harry purchased several additional books about the wizarding world and magic in general. Professor Burbage prevented Harry from getting too crazy in his purchasing of books by reminding him that he now had access to the Hogwarts library and informing Harry about how to owl order books from the bookstore while he was at school.

The item Harry was most excited to shop for that morning was his wand. According to Mr. Ollivander, the proprietor of the wand shop Ollivander Wands, the wand chose the wizard. If that was the case Harry was not suited to use dozens of different wands. It took well over an hour for Harry to find the wand best suited for him and when he did he learned that it was the brother wand to Lord Voldemort. Harry didn't know what to make of that information, but it did put a bit of a damper on Harry's mood to be reminded of the man who killed his parents.

Before Harry realized it was time for him and Professor Burbage to return to Hogwarts. However, Harry had one last thing he was hoping to be able to purchase.

"Professor," Harry began in a very hesitant tone. "I noticed on the parchment that students are allowed to bring a pet with them to Hogwarts."

"That is true, Mr. Potter." Professor Burbage replied in an equally hesitant tone. "Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering if I could purchase an owl of my own." Harry recognized by the look on Professor Burbage's face that she was prepared to deny his request. "It would make writing to my relatives a lot easier during term if I had a reliable means to contact them." The only thing Harry neglected to mention was the only person he intended to write to was his sister.

To Harry's surprise the look on Professor Burbage's face became thoughtful before a smile spread across her kind face. "Alright Harry. We'll head to the Eeylops Owl Emporium before returning to Hogwarts."

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Harry couldn't keep himself from smiling as he looked around at the different owls on display. They were all so beautiful; it was hard for Harry to simply choose one particular owl over another. Harry knew he had to find the most intelligent owl he could, if his plan to keep in contact with Lexi were to work.

There was a brown barn owl that showed promise due to his friendly disposition. While there was an eagle owl, it seemed a bit too stiff to perform the functions Harry would need. The great horned owl Harry saw didn't seem to like him very much.

Then Harry saw her. She was a snowy owl, with amazing brown eyes that clearly reflected intelligence. Staring at her beautiful white feathers, Harry believed he found the owl he was destined to share with Lexi. As soon as Harry approached this particular owl, and reached his hand out to stroke her, the owl nipped him on the finger.

"That means she likes you Harry," Professor Burbage said as Harry jerked his hand back.

"Really?" Harry asked, unsure of proper owl behavior.

"Oh yes, Harry," Professor Burbage replied. "We'll have to obtain a book on owl care for you, so you can learn more about how owls behave."

“Excellent,” was Harry’s only response as he picked up the owl’s cage to bring her to the front of the store.

Harry wasn’t sure why but simply looking at this owl Harry knew that his life was going to improve in ways he never expected.

~*~

Professor Burbage had Harry’s owl fly to Hogwarts and meet Harry there, since it would be difficult to travel with the owl in the floo. As they walked up the main street of Hogsmead towards Hogwarts, Harry knew it had to be around lunch time due to how hungry he was. The closer they moved towards Hogwarts the easier it was to see there were a cluster of people surrounding the gate to the school.

Harry turned quickly towards Professor Burbage when he heard a hiss escape her lips. “What is going on Professor?” Harry asked, his curiosity getting the better of him.

“I’m not completely sure, but I recognize one of those people standing near the gate, she was in my year at Hogwarts.” Professor Burbage replied as she came to a complete stop. “I’d recognize her platinum blonde hair and those ridiculous glasses even from this distance. At least one of those people in that crowd is a reporter with the Daily Prophet.”

“The Daily Prophet?” Harry asked in spite of the fact he knew they need to hurry if he wanted to return early enough for lunch before his afternoon classes.

“You don’t even...” Professor Burbage began before a blush covered her face. “Forget I said that, the Daily Prophet is the major newspaper published in magical England.” Professor Burbage replied slipping into lecture mode. “In fact it is the only daily magical newspaper originating in England, which makes the Daily Prophet the major source of news within the magical community. There is the Wizarding Wireless Network but that is very similar to a muggle radio compared to a written newspaper.”

A sickly look crossed Harry's face as he contemplated the arrival of members of the press at Hogwarts. "Why would they be here?" Harry was nearly dreading Professor Burbage's response.

"Well, the most likely assumption is that they learned of your return to the wizarding world, and they want to cover it. To most of the wizarding world you are a hero, so it would make sense for the news sources to cover your return." That was the exact response Harry was dreading.

"Is there a way for us to avoid them?" Harry asked his desperation was evident in his tone.

"Unfortunately there isn't at this time Harry." A sad look crossed Professor Burbage's face as she said this. "If anyone tries to ask you something you can just ignore them. You are under no obligations to answer any questions."

At those words Harry seemed to stand a little straighter. "Come on," Professor Burbage started with her head held high. "There is no reason to delay our return any longer."

With those final words, Harry and Professor Burbage walked up the rest of the path to Hogwarts.

"There he is," a shrill woman with bright blonde hair cried. "Get his picture Bozo! Mr. Potter, why did you leave Hogwarts to miss your first few classes?"

A man on the other side of the cluster of people was asking things at the same time as the first lady. "Mr. Potter, John Jacobs from the WWN, How did you defeat You-Know-Who?"

After that question Harry could barely tell one question from another. There were so many people talking over one another. It was very overwhelming for Harry to deal with. The only thing that specifically caught Harry's eye was a lone girl who seemed just younger than himself with straw yellow hair looking at a flower near the gate. She was the only person there that was not paying any attention to Harry. Harry had no idea why she was standing over there all alone, but

before he could contemplate the girl any longer he had been swept across the threshold of the Hogwarts gate by Professor Burbage.

"Vultures," Harry heard Professor Burbage hiss under her breath. "Well Harry, we have made it back. We need to hurry to the Great Hall if we want to get there before lunch is finished being served."

As they began to make their way up the path to the main part of the castle Professor Burbage seemed to hesitate a second before stopping Harry by placing an arm on his shoulder. "Harry, if there is anything you need or want to discuss with someone, feel free to come to me at anytime. I know you don't know a lot about the magical world, and perhaps I can help you by explaining things that may confuse you."

A mischievous smile crossed her face before she continued. "And perhaps you could explain some things about the muggle world to me. I may be the Muggle Studies professor, but I'll be the first to admit, that a person who has lived for a muggle for most of their life will beat a pureblood who has rigorously studied the muggle culture any day."

Professor Burbage's last statement caused Harry to smile. While he might not know a lot about the magical world, at least he knew something that not all of the students of Hogwarts knew a lot about. He could deal with the stares, he was used to it from the Dursleys, and muggleborn students were no better off than he was in terms of their knowledge of the wizarding world prior to their arrival at Hogwarts. Perhaps becoming a part of the magical world would not be nearly as difficult as Harry initial thought it would be.

~*~

A/N: I owe a big thank you to everyone who has reviewed this story so far. You guys are an excellent source of inspiration for me to continue to push out a couple of chapters a week for my beta. Zephy, hugs and thanks for being an amazing friend and beta, and for putting up with my thousands of questions relating to each chapter and what the reader takes away with them. Another person I need to thank is my best friend Yadlam, she was the one who convinced me to write. Without her encouragement there would be no story.

I hope this chapter answered some of the lingering questions about Dumbledore and whether or not he knew of Lexi. The sorting hat, who shares an office with Dumbledore did not know of her, draw your own conclusions from that for the time being.

I'm not sure if I'll be posting another chapter this week. I had surgery this morning to remove my gallbladder and I'm doing good but I'm in a lot of pain. I'm not sure how often I'll be on my laptop this week due to the pain. At the latest chapter six will be uploaded on Monday.

Foria

Next Chapter: The Freedom of the Air

Chapter 6: The Freedom of the Air

Harry had been at Hogwarts for a little over a week now, and Lexi could not believe how utterly miserable she was. Of course she had always known that her best friend was her older brother, but she never realized how much she would miss him if he wasn't there. When she and Harry learned about Hogwarts, Lexi was extremely excited for Harry to be accepted. She thought it was amazing that Harry would be able to learn about magic and what made them special. But now, she wasn't so sure that being without him was worth it.

Ever since Harry left, the Dursleys had been completely terrible. The morning of September 1st, Aunt Petunia woke Lexi up expecting Harry to be there as well. When he wasn't, Aunt Petunia started behaving oddly. It all started with her not assigning Lexi chores to perform for the morning. Then at lunch Aunt Petunia went the entire meal without insulting Lexi or her parents. Not to mention that she had forgotten to assign Lexi afternoon chores to perform as well.

However, by the time Uncle Vernon came home from work something had changed. It was almost as though Aunt Petunia came to terms with the fact that Harry was gone, and since Harry wasn't there anymore, someone else had to pick up the slack. Lexi knew from the time she was a little girl that she had an unusually large amount of chores to do every day. But now, her old amount would be a welcome relief. It was very difficult to do the same number of chores that was usually performed by two people all alone.

Dudley was creepy the day that Harry had left. He even threatened her in front of the Dursley home while she was weeding that afternoon. Luckily, her plan of staying close to number four worked and Dudley went off to Smeltings without any incidents. That was a small welcomed relief in her miserable lonely life.

It wasn't like Lexi only missed Harry due to her increased number of chores. She missed him for a whole slew of reasons. She missed her confident and her friend. Harry had been the only person Lexi felt like she could be herself around and now he was gone. He was the only person she could talk to and share things with. But most of all she

missed him because Harry was the only person who ever told her that they loved her.

The letter she received two days after Harry went to school had surprised Lexi. She never imagined they would be able to communicate with one another while Harry was at Hogwarts. And to learn that they had wizarding money, and that the snowy owl who delivered the letter was their owl. It was unfathomable to a girl who never had anything of her own before.

Lying on the thin mattress on her cupboard floor, finishing the final touches on her letter for her brother, Lexi Potter began to mentally count down the days until Harry could return to her for the Christmas holiday. While writing to each other was nice, it had nothing on being able to see her brother in person.

~*~

... I can't believe how intelligent Hedwig is! (That's the name I think we should name our snowy owl. She didn't seem to like just the simple name Snowy. I found the name in the history of magic book you sent me. Hedwig was a patron saint for orphans. So it seems fitting that our guardian owl would be named after such a person. Hope you don't mind!)

Anyway, Hedwig waited until I was all alone taking out the trash yesterday afternoon to deliver your letter to me. The first time she delivered one, it was while I was walking home from school. She seems smart enough if she delivers the letters to me when the Dursleys are not around to see her.

Also, thank you for sending me those books. I'm glad I'll be able to learn a bit about magic even if I'm not going to be able to practice it till I go to Hogwarts myself. Were you able to read them first? If you were able to, I have a question about the principle behind transfiguring an inanimate object to become a living organism. Let me know if you'll be able to help!

Harry, I miss you. Do well in all your classes for me. And take lots of notes for me to read later!

Love,

Lexi

Harry stared down at the piece of paper in his hand, trying to hold back his tears. Every day it seemed like he missed his sister more and more. Taking several deep calming breaths, Harry was able to maintain his composure. It wouldn't make due to breakdown in front of the whole school.

So far Hogwarts was nothing like what Harry expected. First and foremost Harry was famous, and everyone seemed to know his story. No matter where he went or what he did people would stare at him and point, like he was some strange creature on display for the world to see. Honestly, it was the first time in Harry's life that he felt like the freak Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon always claimed he was.

None of the students ever approached him to talk or to do homework with. And when Harry would ask someone if they wanted to work with him they would either blush and giggle (the girls) or give him funny looks and tell him they heard from Ron what he was like (the boys).

His classes were alright. Most of the teachers seemed fine and were not affected by his fame. However, whenever it came to working with a partner in any class, Harry was always the last to be paired up. It was like physical education class all over again, no one wanted freaky Potter on their team.

While most of his teachers were nice to him, there was one teacher that seemed to hate him. Professor Snape, the head of Slytherin house, and the potions professor, just wouldn't give him a break. On the Friday, during their first lesson, Snape had made a point of making fun of his 'celebrity status' whatever that meant. Then Snape began questioning him a lot of different things related to potion making, even though Hermione was attempting to volunteer the answers, Snape refused to call on her instead.

All in all Harry had to say potions was Harry's least favorite class. Luckily he only had that class once a week. Harry did wish he had

Professor Burbage as a teacher this year. She was so kind to Harry the day she took him to Diagon Alley, and whenever he saw her in the hallway she would always smile and wave to him or say hello. At least she seemed to like him for being Harry instead of him being the Boy-Who-Lived.

Harry's thoughts were abruptly cut off when Audrey let out a loud gasp next to him. She was the only student who didn't seem to care that he was the Boy-Who-Lived and made a point of saving him a seat at the breakfast table every morning.

"What's wrong?" the inquisitive voice of Hermione Granger cut through the usual noise of the Great Hall. While Hermione was in all of his classes, sat with him every day in the Great Hall, and tended to study at the same time as him in the library, she never said a word to him since the train ride to Hogwarts.

"Well, there is some startling news today in the Daily Prophet," Audrey replied from behind her newspaper.

"Was it another article about me?" Harry hesitantly asked. There had been several articles speculating about where he lived prior to re-entering the wizarding world, and trying to determine exactly what he was doing out of Hogwarts the first morning of term.

"Actually that has seemed to have died down," Audrey responded again from behind her paper. "Today there is something about a breakout at Azkaban Prison."

"Azkaban Prison?" Hermione asked with her head tipped to the side, as if she was trying to read the paper Audrey was holding. "I've never heard of that prison."

"It's the wizarding prison, guarded by the Dementors," Audrey replied a bit distractedly.

"What is so startling about someone escaping from that prison?" Hermione continued. "Stuff like that unfortunately tends to occur a couple of times a year in the muggle world."

Audrey finally lowered the paper to look at Harry and Hermione while talking in a deeply serious tone. "No one has ever escaped from Azkaban before. It is the most guarded prison in the world between the charms and wards used on the island and the Dementor guards. It would take some serious dark magic to fool the guards, let alone the charms and wards."

Hermione looked appalled. "Who could do something like that?"

"The prisoner who escaped was Sirius Black," Audrey continued with a scared look on her face. "He was a firm supporter of You-Know-Who, and was sent to jail for killing one wizard and twelve muggles with a single curse."

"Oh my goodness!" Hermione exclaimed in shock. "How do you know all of that?"

"It was in one of the articles here in the paper," Audrey explained while gesturing to the discarded Daily Prophet.

"What does that this mean?" Hermione continued to ask. "What is going to happen?"

"I don't know," Audrey replied. "This has never happened before."

Harry was definitely disturbed by Audrey's last statement although he tried to forget it. A follower of the guy who killed his parents was on the loose, and broke out of a place that no one had ever escaped from before. For some reason a feeling of dread overcame him. But there should be no reason for that guy to have anything to do with him, right?

~*~

The news of Sirius Black's escape died down as the week progressed. Harry heard there was a rumor that the Ministry of Magic had wanted to place Dementors around Hogwarts to protect the students from the mass murderer. However, since there was no reason to expect Sirius Black to go to Hogwarts, Professor Dumbledore had vetoed the idea.

Before Harry knew it, Thursday afternoon arrived and brought about something Harry was looking forward to: his first flying lesson! The fact that it was with the Slytherin first years, with whom he never seemed to get along with, didn't even seem to faze him.

Since Ron had explained to him about flying and the wizarding sport of Quidditch on the Hogwarts Express, Harry was secretly waiting to learn to fly. In his mind it was one of the calling cards of being a wizard was the ability to fly. He had heard numerous stories in primary school where a witch or wizard had the power to fly, sometimes with a broom, other times without.

In the early afternoon Harry met the other Gryffindor first years out in the court yard waiting for Madam Hooch, the flying instructor of Hogwarts. He knew Hermione Granger was very nervous about the upcoming lesson. All throughout breakfast she had peppered Audrey with questions about the best techniques and specific facts she learned from a book called Quidditch Through the Ages.

Harry had a feeling that Hermione was truly nervous since flying was the one class where memorization and intelligence was not going to help her. From everything Harry had seen and heard about flying, it had a lot to do with ability and instincts.

"Gather around children," the brisk voice of Madam Hooch broke through the crowd. Harry was a bit startled to realize he never noticed the Slytherins joining the Gryffindors in waiting for Madam Hooch.

"Alright, now that I have your undivided attention, it is time for us to begin," Madam Hooch stated while looking around at the various first year students in front of her. "Now I know many of you have parents or older siblings who have taught you how to fly when you were younger. Be as that may, you are all beginners since I will be taking the time to teach you the proper technique and form needed while flying solo on a broom."

"That said," Madam Hooch glared at Draco Malfoy and some Slytherins who were talking instead of paying attention to her, "I expect all eyes and ears focused on me at all times. If I feel you are

not following directions you will be grounded and not allowed to fly for a month. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Madam Hooch," the entire class said at once.

"Excellent," Madam Hooch exclaimed while clapping her hands together. "Now I want you each to stand next to a broom and hold your dominate hand over the broom, while saying the command 'up'. This will cause the broom to come to your outstretched hand so you can properly get on the broom."

All at once the first year students rushed towards the brooms. It looked like to Harry that some of them were being a bit picky with exactly which broom they chose. Harry, not knowing the differences between the types of brooms simply picked the only broom not already claimed. This landed Harry directly between Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger.

After each student picked their broom they all took turns commanding their brooms to rise. Harry saw that both Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger were having difficulties since their brooms would merely roll over when they attempted to get them to come up to their hand.

Harry clearly and calmly said the command, 'up,' and his broom rocketed straight into his awaiting hand.

"Go job, Mr. Potter," Madam Hooch said while she corrected Draco Malfoy's grip on his broom, across from where Harry was standing. Draco just glared at Harry as Madam Hooch fussed over what a natural Harry must be.

Slowly yet surely everyone in the class was eventually able to get their broom to rise to their outstretched hands and learn the proper way of balancing on their brooms.

"Great," Madam Hooch professed while looking around at all of the students. "Now on my whistle we will all slowly rise up into the air."

But before Madam Hooch was able to blow her whistle Neville started to scream as his broom started to rise. Immediately Madam Hooch jumped on her broom and attempted to stop Neville's out of control broom. Unfortunately, she was unable to reach Neville before his broom took a sharp dive to the ground.

"What a pity," Madam Hooch exclaimed. "I think you have a broken arm, Mr. Longbottom. I'll escort him to the hospital wing." Madam Hooch explained to the class at large. "In the meantime, I want all of you to stand firmly on the ground. As you can see injuries are easy to occur when while flying. If I find out any of you disobeyed me, you will be out of Hogwarts faster than you can say Quidditch."

As soon as Madam Hooch walked away, Harry saw a glint of light reflecting near the grass where Neville stood before taking off. Harry walked over to investigate it and discovered it was the Remembrall that Neville's Gran sent him just earlier that day. Picking it up and putting it in his pocket, Harry decided to give it back to Neville at his earliest convenience.

While Harry was deciding that it appeared as though Draco Malfoy goaded Ron Weasley into a fight that resulted in them being airborne. Unfortunately for both boys Professor McGonagall caught them in the act.

~*~

"I bet you're surprised to still see me here," the shrill voice of Draco Malfoy interrupted Harry's dinner. Harry was sitting alone near the end of the Gryffindor table near the head table.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Harry said while concentrating on his meal.

"My father was able to protest that old bat McGonagall's punishment," Draco said with his head held high. "Even if that Weasley scum was able to benefit from my father's power as well, it proves how powerful the Malfoy family is and why you should be friends with me."

"Excuse me?" Harry asked completely stunned. He could not believe that the only person who wanted to be friends with him was Draco Malfoy, the one person who reminded Harry the most of Dudley Dursley.

"I know you were trying to play a joke on the train," Draco continued in an arrogant tone, "that you really were not trying to snub me. Therefore, I'm willing to forgive you and let it slide."

"I'm sorry," Harry replied, although he really wasn't sorry, "I'm not interested in being your friend." Harry could clearly see Draco's face turning beat red.

"You'll be sorry," Draco muttered. "I challenge you to a duel, tonight in the trophy room. Crabbe will be my second."

A duel, Harry had not learned how to duel yet and there was no way he was going to get into something that was over his head yet. "No," Harry said clearly, finally looking Draco in the eyes. "I won't participate in a duel."

Draco just looked at Harry with shock on his face. "But you're a Gryffindor!" Draco yelled, "of course you want to duel. What are you, a baby?"

"Get a life," Harry said before getting up from his half finished dinner and walking out of the Great Hall.

"You can't duel Draco. You'll get yourself in trouble and lose all the points I gained for Gryffindor," the know-it-all voice of Hermione Granger rang across the Entrance Hall.

Harry spun around. He was sick of people ignoring him or treating him like he did something wrong, when in fact he had done nothing at all. Harry had finally hit his breaking point.

"You don't know everything," Harry said in a highly frustrated tone, as he moved closer to the bushy-haired witch. "Books don't tell you everything and you are not the ultimate source of knowledge in this school."

Hermione's eyes flashed with anger. "How dare you suggest that I think that? Let me guess, you know more than me, oh great, wise Harry Potter."

Harry just laughed at Hermione. "I hardly know anything especially about the magical world. Hell, I didn't even know I was a wizard until I received my Hogwarts letter, nor did I know about how my parents were killed by Voldemort until the sorting hat told me."

Hermione's look of anger turned to one of shock and contemplation. But before Hermione could comment on what Harry told her he continued to speak. "I turned Draco down for his duel. I am well aware that I did not know enough to defend myself in a duel let alone attack another student. I have no intention of getting in trouble and sent home from Hogwarts."

With that Harry turned around and walked away, leaving a very flustered Hermione behind.

~*~

"Did you hear Malfoy talk to Potter earlier tonight at dinner?" The voice of Ron Weasley carried through the door of the first year boys' dormitory.

Harry had just returned from spending his free time reading until curfew in the library. Ron's voice and the subject matter made Harry stop and consider whether or not he really wanted to enter.

"Yeah," the voice of Dean Thomas continued the conversation. "Can you believe that ponce Potter actually turned Draco down?"

"I think he may have been scared to take on a wizard who was worth his salt." The nasal voice of Seamus Finnigan joined in. "I think Malfoy would have wiped the floor with him."

"That would have been so cool," Ron's voice became a bit dreamy. "I wish Malfoy would have hurt Potter that way the git would get what is coming to him."

Harry had heard enough. Turning around, Harry began to take the stairs in twos and threes, trying to put as much distance between him and the dorm as possible. Luckily he had the book he just taken out of the library on him to read in the common room. It was going to be a while before Harry would feel comfortable enough to go to his own dorm.

~*~

Friday's potion lesson flew by quickly, well as quickly as any potion lesson could pass. For the second straight week, Professor Snape reacted to Harry with poorly hidden contempt. Not to mention, the Slytherin students took their cues from their head of house and began making rude comments and remarks to Harry whenever they passed by his work station.

In a surprising twist of events, Hermione Granger had sat at his work table and became his potion partner for the day. That morning at breakfast she had been missing, and Harry hated to admit it, but he had been concerned about her whereabouts. Even though she never directly spoke to him, in the two weeks they spent at school Hermione Granger had become a reluctant fixture in his life.

Harry had been relieved when Hermione had walked into the classroom and immediately sat down beside him. The week before Seamus and Dean had a loud argument over which one of them would be forced to have Harry as his partner. Harry was indifferent to it all, but a warm feeling started in the pit of his stomach. Perhaps, there would be some hope that Hermione could one day be his friend.

By the end of the lesson Harry's hopes had been dashed. Hermione had not said a single word to him throughout the lesson, even though they had worked on the potion together. It was kind of awkward to create a potion without saying a single word to your partner, but for some reason Harry and Hermione were able to do it while making a successful potion.

After the lesson Harry took his time in cleaning up his work space, in case Hermione wanted to say something in private. Yet, she merely

picked up her possessions and left the classroom. At lunch, Harry once again noted her absence and became concerned since Hermione had appeared to have missed breakfast and now lunch. Harry knew all too well what it felt like to miss a meal or two and hoped that whatever Hermione was doing at least she was getting something to eat.

Since the Gryffindor first years had Friday afternoon off Harry found himself once again at his favorite table in the library. Harry began to work on the little homework he received, while wondering what else he should do with his weekend. If he finished all of his homework now, it was unlikely he would have a legitimate reason to remain in the library all weekend.

Harry knew it was very doubtful that anyone in his year, or the school for that matter would want anything to do with him, so he would need to come up with something to do.

Harry suddenly looked up from his charms essay. It felt like someone was watching him. Harry quickly glanced around the room unable to see anyone. When he decided it was merely his mind playing tricks on him, Harry turned back to his essay.

Not more than five minutes later, Harry once again felt as though someone was watching him. This time instead of immediately looking up, Harry took his time and pretended to be stretching as he did so he quickly scanned the room. As he did he saw Hermione Granger, who was standing in between two shelves of books quickly turn away from him.

Harry sighed as he turned back to finish his essay. Harry knew he had been a bit harsh on her the night before, but Harry wasn't sorry for his words. Hermione had to know that things were not always as it appeared. Harry resented the fact that he had mentioned the small fact that he didn't know his own story when he had first met her. He didn't want to talk about that with anyone, and he said it to Hermione in the heat of anger.

The only thing Harry could hope for that perhaps something good could come from sharing that information with Hermione. Perhaps

she would give him another chance once she knew that he had never played a joke on her. That he wasn't the person that half the school thought he was. Unfortunately, Hermione's strange behavior was not encouraging.

~*~

Due to the flying lesson that was unfortunately cut short, on Sunday Madam Hooch opened up the Quidditch pitch for all first year students who wanted some additional air time. Considering that Harry had yet to have an opportunity to fly, Harry was more than willing to fly as soon as possible.

After shoveling down a fast breakfast, Harry walked as quickly as he could out to the Quidditch pitch. Madam Hooch had opened it up to all first years, but she extended the time on the pitch from the normal hour class to four hours. The pitch would be open from eight in the morning till noon.

That was why Harry was waiting at the entrance of the Quidditch pitch for Madam Hooch nearly a half an hour early. He was merely too excited to wait up in the castle. From his position by the Gryffindor entrance of to the pitch, Harry had a clear view of the broom cupboard where all of the school brooms were stored.

Since the disastrous first lesson, Harry spent some of his time studying the different types of brooms available in wizarding world, and various moves a person could do while flying. It wasn't like Harry had anything better to do since no one his age would give him the time of day.

To Harry, it seemed that the moment Harry's hand touch the broom something awoke in him, and all Harry wanted to do was fly a broom. He had told Lexi all about his brief experience with the broom and she seemed extremely excited at the prospect of flying as well. He had already promised to give her every single detail about his experience as soon as he was done with his flying time that day. With any luck, if Harry sent Hedwig with a letter to Lexi as soon as this lesson was over she would have it by the evening or the next morning.

From what Harry had seen during the first lesson, the brooms that Hogwarts had as school brooms were not the top-of-the-line brooms. In fact many of the school brooms were very old and needed to be replaced from what Harry could tell. Even though Harry was no broom expert, it was fairly simple to be able to tell a good quality broom from a bad. If the tail twigs were being to fall out, it was safe to assume that a new broom would be needed in the near future.

"You're here pretty early, Mr. Potter," the voice of Madam Hooch broke Harry from his thoughts. "But I would expect no less from the son of James Potter."

"Excuse me," Harry said unable to stop himself, even though he could be seen as being rude. "What do you mean by that?"

Madam Hooch blinked at him a few seconds before she responded. "I'm sorry, Mr. Potter. I thought you knew all about your father and Quidditch. James Potter was one of the finest Quidditch players this school has ever seen. I was on the Hufflepuff team your father's seventh year at Hogwarts. He was an excellent captain and a worthy adversary on the Quidditch pitch."

"Thank you for telling me," Harry said with a smile on his face. "I appreciate it very much."

"Yes," Madam Hooch said a bit distractedly. "I'll be happy to tell you more about your father's Quidditch career here at Hogwarts at a later time. We don't have enough time to do it justice before your peers should be joining us."

Harry nodded his head in agreement. He desperately wanted to know anything Madam Hooch was willing to tell him but he too knew other people would be joining them soon. Truth be told, this is something he wanted to learn in private.

"Would you be willing to help me collect the brooms for us to use today?" Madam Hooch asked.

"Of course," Harry replied as the two of them walked over to the broom shed. He was nearly shaking with anticipation.

A few Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws joined Harry and Madam Hooch at eight am. It seemed as though most of the Slytherins and Gryffindors were having a bit of a lie-in on that Sunday regardless of the fact that they would be able to fly. The other first years stayed as far away from Harry as possible. But Harry didn't dwell on it; the prospect of being able to fly let the insult simply slid out of his mind.

After Madam Hooch spent several minutes going over the basics with Harry, the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws already had been in the air at their lesson during the week. Once she was confident that Harry would be fine, Madam Hooch let Harry go into the air for the first time.

It was indescribable, the feeling of the wind against his face and blowing through his hair. The simple freedom that being in air, of not being connect to the ground. To Harry, it all just made him feel free, like he didn't have a care in the world. It was amazing.

Harry had started out going slow doing simple laps around the pitch. But the longer he stayed in the air the more daring he became. He started to go higher and then swoop down into a dive to the ground. The more he would do it the more confidence he would gain and the higher he would start out and the closer to the ground he would end up.

He was like a bird.

Free of all obligations.

Free of all the pressures of his life.

Free from the Dursleys and the wizarding world.

Free from all expectations.

Harry wasn't the Boy-Who-Lived up here. Harry was just Harry. He had never been his carefree and happy in his life. He needed to share this experience with Lexi as soon as possible. Something deep down in Harry told him that Lexi would enjoy this just as much as he was.

Up in the air Harry lost all connection with reality. Time meant nothing. To Harry it felt like no time had even passed, that there was no one else with him on the pitch while he was in the air.

Suddenly, out of nowhere a ball went whizzing past Harry's left ear, curiosity over took him as Harry dove to catch the small white object. A few feet from the ground Harry grabbed the white golf ball and pulled out of the dive to the sound of applause and cheering.

Turning to look over his shoulder, Harry could make out the forms of six older students, Madam Hooch and Professor McGonagall. Harry was a bit confused over what was going on and where the other first year students had gone so he went over to the assembled crowd.

"Mr. Potter," the stern voice of Professor McGonagall reached his ears as soon as he was in hearing distance. For some reason Harry started to cringe as she began. "That was simply... simply... it was amazing. Do you think you could do that again?" The excitement in her tone was ringing through loud and clear.

Harry was a bit taken aback. First Professor McGonagall sounded angry, and then she was speechless, now she was excited. What on earth could he have done?

"I'm not sure what you mean, Professor. I only caught a ball." Harry replied in his most respectful tone of voice.

"Do you hear that, Fred?" A red headed boy began.

"Sure did, George," the first boy's exact double replied.

Shaking his head at his brother, George continued. "He makes a twenty foot dive to catch a golf ball..."

"Pulls out just as it seems as though he was about to kiss the tuff," the second one interjected.

"The he acts as if it were nothing special or spectacular." The third one finished.

“Simply amazing,” the second one, Fred, said as he shook his head. “Think all heroes are this modest?”

“Quiet you two,” the gruff voice of an older student cut the first boy off from replying to his brother’s question. “Is it true this is your first time on a broom?” The older boy asked after turning his attention solely on Harry.

“Of course it was, Mr. Wood,” Professor McGonagall answered for Harry. “He lived with muggles until he reentered the wizarding world on the first of September.”

“That boy has clear Quidditch talent just like his father,” Madam Hooch began to gush before being stopped by a stern look from Professor McGonagall.

“Mr. Potter,” Professor McGonagall began addressing her attention solely on Harry again. “Let me ask for the second and last time, do you think you can do that again?”

“Of course,” Harry answered the question like it was the most natural thing in the world.

“Prove it,” Professor McGonagall challenged.

Harry did.

~*~

... So it turns out that they wanted me to become the new Seeker for the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Gryffindor has had some problems with Seekers the past two years since a guy named Charlie Weasley graduated from school. I am the youngest player in over a century to be able to play for their house team. That means I’ll have practice two to three times a week with three games throughout the year. Madam Hooch said I would be excused from all flying lessons from now on, but I think I might attend them anyway. It would give me more time to be in the air.

Oliver Wood, the captain of the team, told me that all the other first years had stopped flying two hours before the team had shown up on the pitch. I flew for six hours without stopping. Madam Hooch just let me keep going past the allotted time for some reason. Wood said Madam Hooch is typically very strict due to the dangers associated with flying so he was a bit surprised that she let me continue to fly. But due to the long amount of time I was in the air, Wood says I already must have a lot of natural endurance on a broom.

Anyway, I better send this off to you. I've got to go to the library to look up more information about the role of the Seeker during the game and moves to learn for practice.

I miss you a lot Lexi.

With love,

Harry

PS. I can't wait to show you how to fly. I just know you'll love it as much as I do.

Lexi stared at her letter from her brother with a small smile on her face as she continued to walk home from school. Hedwig had just delivered Harry's letter to her and was now following her on her way home. Lexi loved the owl so much. It was like the owl was trying to look out for her or something.

Harry seemed to love to fly if the way he kept rambling on and on about it was any indication. Lexi was a bit leery about learning to fly since the concept seemed so strange. But truth be told she was looking forward to the day that Harry could teach her how to fly on a broom.

"There she is," the shrill voice of Malcolm, Dudley's friend rang through the chill fall air. Lexi cringed on the inside. She thought she was rid of all of those bullies Dudley called friends when Dudley went off to Smeltings.

"Guess the freak thought she got rid of us," the creepy voice of Dennis replied to Lexi's obvious reaction to their presence.

"Just because Piers and Dudley are gone doesn't mean that we all are," Gordon added to the conversation. "Dudley told us we should get a few blows in for him so you don't forget him."

Lexi did the only thing she could think to do; she ran off as fast as she could, praying that the older boys were too fat to catch her. As she ran, she could hear Hedwig screeching in the air over her head. Hopefully the noise her owl was making would attract the attention of an adult to help her.

As Lexi continued to run, clutching Harry's letter to her chest she could hear the foot steps of the boys following her. Trying to go a little faster, Lexi put all of her energy into running as fast as her nearly ten-year-old legs would let her.

Running into an alley way between two houses, Lexi suddenly went crashing to the ground. She had concentrated so much on running she wasn't paying attention to her surroundings and she tripped on a rock.

The foot steps of the boys slowed down, they had reached her. Lexi desperately reached for her precious letter that had flown out of her hands when she fell. If she was going to be beat up she needed that letter. It was from her brother and was one of the few things that made her feel good. When she got home and was locked in her cupboard for being a beat up good for nothing freak, at least she would have Harry's words to comfort her.

Malcolm and Dennis started to laugh at her predicament. Once she had Harry's letter in her hand, the boys' attention was drawn to it.

"Give us that piece of paper, freak," Gordon demanded. "We want to see why you want it so much."

Lexi continued to clutch the letter tight to her chest and closed her eyes, preparing for the beating that was about to begin.

"Get away from her," a raspy cold voice rang through the alley from behind where Lexi had fell.

"What the..." one of the boys began before they were cut off.

"Get out of here!" the man said more forcefully this time. "Get away from the girl. Get lost. Are the lot of you really that dumb? By Merlin, you muggles can certainly be rather dim."

The dumbfounded boys only moved when the noise indicated that man began to move towards them. Lexi heard their footsteps begin and only quicken as she continued to hear the man move towards them.

Lexi hesitantly opened her eyes and looked at her savior. A tall, extremely thin man with long tangled hair and deep gray eyes stared back at her.

"Hello Lexi," the man said with a mystifying smile.

~*~

A/N: Dum dum dummmm! I've been dying to post this chapter for a bit, can anyone guess why? ;) A big thanks to everyone who has reviewed this story you guys are awesome! I big shout out to Picky, Memory King and passionismywriting for their comments and review of the last chapter. Their long comments help me focus this story to make sure it is going where I want it to go. Thanks once more to the world's best beta and friend, zephy for her hard work on behalf of this story.

Foria

Next Chapter: A Sirius Dilemma

Chapter 7: A Sirius Dilemma

“Hello Lexi,” the man said with a mystifying smile.

“How did you know my name?” Lexi asked hesitantly. No one other than Harry had ever called her Lexi before and now her mysterious savior knew her nickname. This wasn’t right.

“I’m an old friend of your parents,” the man replied. “I’ve known your name since the day you were born. Your mother wanted to name you Lexa while your father wanted to name you Alexandra. They compromised on Alexa, but your mother insisted on calling you Lexi anyways.”

Lexi’s eyes grew wide at what the man was telling her. Her mother called her Lexi. It was a strange feeling to know something about her mother. For so long she was just a mystery to Lexi, merely an idea. Everyone has a mother, so she and Harry must have had one at some point. But now she knew something about the woman who brought her into this world. Perhaps this man could tell her more.

“Who are you?” Lexi asked once she realized she still didn’t know his name.

The man nervously licked his lips. “My name is Sirius Black, and I’m your godfather.”

Lexi crouched down to the ground as low as she could go to the ground. Harry had told her about Sirius Black, the escaped prisoner. What was he doing here? Should she try to run away? What if he had a wand and was planning on hurting her?

“Please, just give me a chance to explain,” the man said holding his hands up in front of him, stalling Lexi’s thoughts. “I needed to know that you were alright. They only mentioned Harry, so I was afraid that something had happened to you. If you want I’ll go away and leave you alone. I just needed to know that you are safe.”

Lexi was definitely confused at the convict’s behavior, but she didn’t have many options. He was blocking her way to escape the alley.

“Alright,” Lexi replied slowly. “Explain.”

“It all started before you were born,” the man began. “Your father and I were the best of friends, brothers in everything but blood...”

~*~

Harry quickly sat down at the Gryffindor table after Quidditch practice to eat a fast dinner before the dinner hour was over. Their practice had once again ran over their allotted time, which meant if the team members were not fast, they would likely be without dinner that evening. All of Harry’s teammates seemed to have reached the table with the same speed and urgency as Harry did, except for the Weasley twins, Fred and George.

When practice ran late, the twins never seemed to make it for dinner. Oliver Wood, their captain had vocalized his suspicion that they had a secret stash of food in their dorm room on more than one occasion. Oliver was an amazing captain who worked each member of the team hard to reach their full potential. He and the female members of the team were rather friendly with Harry.

The only noticeable exceptions were Fred and George Weasley, the beaters. They both seemed to hate Harry with a passion and even seemed to aim the Bludgers at Harry more often than any other team member. Harry guessed that was to be expected considering they were Ron Weasley’s older brothers and Ron himself did not particularly care for Harry since their meeting on the Hogwarts’ Express.

Since joining the Gryffindor Quidditch team, Harry’s time at Hogwarts seemed to pass at a rapid rate. Before Harry realized it he had been at Hogwarts for over a month. Quidditch practice tended to take his mind off of his troubles with his classmates and gave him something to look forward to other than the classes every day.

That being said Harry had another bright spot in his life at Hogwarts. Hermione Granger started sharing a two-person desk with Harry at every class. While they did not talk a lot, other than to ask the

occasional question about the task they were attempting to perform. It was still far better and more comfortable than when Harry either sat alone or with someone who didn't want to share with him.

All things considered things were significantly better for Harry than when he had first arrived at Hogwarts.

The only thing now was Lexi's birthday was coming up in less than two weeks and Harry didn't have a present for her. Harry had wanted to purchase a dress for Lexi to wear at school, and now even though he had the money to purchase a dress for her, he did not have the resources to buy one while he was at Hogwarts.

Harry felt it was best to save purchasing a dress for Lexi for when he went home for the holidays. It would be the first Christmas that both Harry and Lexi would be able to not worry about how much something cost when they went to buy each other presents.

But that didn't solve his current problem. Harry had only a few days to come up with the perfect present for Lexi and he was currently out of ideas. He couldn't conjure or transfigure something to give Lexi since it required magic well past his skill level. Perhaps he could make her a potion of some sort, but would he have enough ingredients?

"Are you almost done, Harry?" Harry's thoughts were cut short by the familiar voice of Hermione Granger.

"Just about," Harry replied hesitantly. This was a bit odd since even though they interacted more frequently than at the start of term, they were not exactly friends and never spoke outside of class. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"No," Hermione replied quickly. "Actually, there is something I can help you with."

As soon as Harry had finished he followed Hermione out of the Great Hall and followed her to a part of the castle he had never seen before. They were two floors up from the ground floor, and they had twisted around several corridors. To tell the truth if Hermione did not guide

him back to the main stairwell, it was very likely that Harry could get lost.

“Where are we going?” Harry finally asked Hermione when it seemed as though their progression through the castle was not about to end.

“The trophy room,” Hermione replied in her brisk tone of voice. “There is something in there I want to show you.”

Once again they fell into a comfortable silence until they reached their final destination. The trophy room wasn’t a room per say. It actually looked more like a long hall where all the school awards and special merits were kept on display. The room seemed to be endless from what Harry could tell. However, immediately Harry was able to see that the newest awards were placed closest to the entrance of the room.

“It should be right around here,” Hermione said walking a few feet away from Harry, while examining the awards in the trophy case.

“What exactly are you looking for?” Harry asked, once again a bit confused on why she would bring him up here to show him something.

“It should be here,” Hermione said a bit distractedly, not answering Harry’s question in the least. Harry decided he would have to wait until Hermione’s attention was fully concentrated on him before he attempted to ask her another question.

Walking to the trophy case, Harry began examining the awards within. Even though he did not know what Hermione was looking for, at least he wouldn’t be completely bored standing around in this large room. There were several different types of awards in the case. There were awards for academic achievement, special services to the school, and several plaques listing the winners of the Quidditch Cup winning team for each school year, and others listing the prefects and headboy and girl for each year.

It seemed as though these trophies were an endless supply of various information.

"Here it is!" Hermione's excited voice was hard to ignore.

Harry walked over to join her and saw she was pointing to a plaque listing the Quidditch Cup winning team for the 1977-1978 school year. On further examining the plaque, one name caught Harry's attention more than any other. James Potter was listed as Chaser that year. Harry reached forward and touched the glass of the case. Even though Madam Hooch had told Harry that his father was a Quidditch player, he had yet to see any physical proof yet there it was.

"That's not all, Harry," Hermione said in barely more than a whisper. "Look at the plaque to the right of it."

Harry had nearly forgotten that she was here. At some point he would have to return to this room to look at the plaque alone. Looking to the right, Harry found another plaque. This one was listing the student leadership of the school. The school prefects and heads for the 1977-1978 school year.

"Thank you Hermione," Harry said in a trembling voice, for there under Headboy was his father's name, James Potter. "I had no idea that my father was Headboy during his seventh year."

"Harry," Hermione said while placing a hand on his shoulder. "Don't you recognize any other name on there?"

Looking at the other assembled names nothing stuck out to Harry. Except, the Headgirl's name was Lily, just like his Mum...

"Evans," Harry said to himself, once again forgetting about Hermione's presence. "Could my mother's name been Lily Evans?"

"It was, Harry," Hermione answered causing Harry to jump a bit. "Your mother and father were the Headboy and girl during their seventh year here at Hogwarts. You really didn't know, did you?"

Harry shook his head unable to express what he wanted to say with words.

“Take this,” Hermione handed Harry a list. “These are the names of several books that may be able to give you some information about your parents.”

“Thank you,” Harry said his voice full of emotion as he took the parchment. “I don’t know how to repay you.”

“You owe me nothing,” Hermione said quickly. “I wanted to do something for you. To show you how sorry I am that I didn’t believe you on the train.”

No words were spoken but none were needed. Harry gained something he never thought he would receive a piece of his parents past, while Hermione gained the one thing she sought, forgiveness from a peer.

~*~

As Lexi walked out of school, she could see the big, black form of Snuffles waiting for her. He was sitting under the shade of a big apple tree, watching all of the students leave the school, while he waited for her. It was a strange feeling to have somebody other than Harry wait for her or want to be in her company, but it was a nice feeling to have.

Since Snuffles’ appearance in her life nearly three weeks ago, her world had turned upside down. When Harry left, she was all alone. Now, she had Snuffles as her constant companion and she wouldn’t trade him for the world. Well, perhaps for Harry, but for nothing less than her brother at the very least.

Walking past the big shaggy dog, Lexi nodded at the animal and he shot up and followed her. When Dudley had attended this school, Aunt Petunia would pick all three of them up from school everyday. Now that she was the only child attending the school, she had to walk to and from school by herself. Lexi believed Aunt Petunia purposely had her walk alone as a means to make her life more miserable; instead it gave her an opportunity to be away from Privet Drive a bit longer every day.

Once they reached Privet Drive, Lexi covertly approached number four. As long as Aunt Petunia didn't see her through the window, Lexi could spend up to a half an hour longer talking with her houseguest, Snuffles. Also, Lexi had to watch out for the snoop neighbors. If they saw Lexi too frequently sneaking into the shed with a big dog, they would say something to Aunt Petunia or Uncle Vernon.

Seeing that the coast was clear, the odd pair snuck around the side of the house and into the shed. As soon as the shed door was closed, Snuffles immediately transformed into his human form of Lexi's convict godfather, Sirius Black; the transformation always made Lexi smile. She loved watching magic at work and loved the fact she could see it happen everyday this way.

"So how was school, kiddo?" Sirius asked in a bit of a raspy tone. Even though he had been hiding out at the Dursleys for a few weeks now, he sometimes still seemed as frail as the day he arrived.

"It went rather well," Lexi answered in a reserved tone, "I got an 'A' on my History exam."

Lexi knew that Sirius was supposed to be her legal guardian, the one to have raised her in her parents' absence, but unfortunate circumstances had found him in jail for a crime he didn't commit. Yet, it was still rather difficult for Lexi to open up to the man she barely knew, even though he had rescued her from Dudley's 'friends'.

"I'm very proud of you, Lexi," Sirius replied with a smile, which caused Lexi to blush. She rarely received any praise from adults and she reveled in the attention.

"Is it warm enough out here for you?" Lexi asked Sirius trying to divert the topic of the conversation away from her.

"Yes, it's much better than I've been used to," Sirius responded. His attempt at a joke did not go unnoticed by Lexi. One really good thing about Sirius was he always tried to make her laugh.

"Where will you go once it becomes really cold?" Lexi questioned genuinely concerned about how long she could expect to have Sirius stay with her.

"I come with a fur coat," Sirius replied inferring to his dog form. "I can stay out here all winter long since the cold won't affect me, as long as I can use the shed as a shelter from the elements. Lexi, I will stay here as long as you need me."

Lexi's mouth dropped open; how did he know what she meant?

"I'm your godfather," Sirius continued, "I should have been here from the very first day you got out of the hospital as a baby. I wish I could have been." Sighing Sirius continued, "But the past is in the past and I will do my best from this day forward to be the best godfather that I can be under the circumstances. Harry right now is safe at Hogwarts; you are the one stuck here!" Sirius made a face at the thought of the Dursleys, "So this is where I am."

"Thanks, Padfoot," Lexi said using the nickname he wanted her to use for the first time. Even though Sirius had said the same thing to her many times over the past few weeks, it was just beginning to sink in that she had an adult who cared for her.

"No problem, kiddo," Sirius replied. "Would you like me to tell you a story about your parents?"

Lexi frantically nodded her head repeatedly; she loved it when Sirius told her stories about her parents' time at Hogwarts.

"Well let's see..." Sirius said while starching his chin. "Have I told you about the time your father covered the Slytherin common room in pink hearts that said 'Severus Snape loves Preppy Prefect Avery'?"

Lexi quickly shook her head no.

"Well it all started when Snape decided to hex, a second year Hufflepuff girl named Hooch, for bumping into him," Sirius began. "Unfortunately for Snape, James had seen the whole thing..."

~*~

Harry was in the library for the third straight day. While being in the library was nothing out of the ordinary, the subject matter he was studying was definitely different. Harry couldn't believe that it never occurred to him to look up the defeat of Voldemort, or his family for that matter. Hermione had told him on the Hogwarts Express that she had read all about him, he just never thought about it until Hermione gave him the booklist.

So here Harry sat with Hermione, at their favorite work station trying to learn about his parents from a series of textbooks and academic studies on Voldemort's rise to power and downfall. Occasionally Harry would glance over the top of his book and give Hermione a small smile, which she would gratefully return. While they weren't exactly friends, at least they were both friendly with one another.

Harry continued to read the book, a bit surprised at what he was learning about the reign of Voldemort. Apparently this wizard, if one could truly consider him that, decided that muggle-born witches and wizards were not worthy to live in his 'perfect world' and he and his followers went on a rampage of fear and violence killing muggle-born witches and wizards as well as muggles.

Quite frankly it was scary to imagine exactly how much power this Voldemort and his followers had. It seemed that most of the wizarding world still to this day refused to call him Voldemort, just You-Know-Who or He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. It was clear to Harry that the fear invoked by Voldemort's name alone was a cause of terror for the wizarding world.

Harry closed the book he had been reading with a sigh. While he learned a lot of general facts about Voldemort's reign, he never learned the specifics about why Voldemort attacked his family. All the books stated that the Potters were strong supporters of Albus Dumbledore, Harry's current Headmaster, which made them targets; none of them could give a specific reason as to why Voldemort chose that moment, that time to go after the Potter family.

The very surprising thing was none of the books ever mentioned that Harry had a sister. Some of the books had even gone as far as to claim that Harry was the 'only child of Lily and James Potter' which really confused Harry. He could say with complete certainty that he had a sister. Heck, he could legally prove his sister was the daughter of James and Lily Potter. But like the sorting hat back on his first day at Hogwarts, it seemed that no one was either aware of, or cared about Lexi.

Harry removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes a bit before he opened the last book Hermione had told him to look at. Maybe this book would be the answer to at least some of his questions. Harry's eyes widened when he stared at the first page he opened to, it was a complete welcomed surprise.

No one knows for sure why You-Know-Who was interested in killing the Potter family. The only thing that could be said with some certainty was that the Potters stood for everything that You-Know-Who opposed. James Potter, a pure-blood from a family that dates back to the Age of the Founders, had married a muggle-born witch, Lily Evans. Both were extremely skilled with magic and their half-blood son, Harry posed a threat to everything You-Know-Who stood for.

You-Know-Who had been after the family for almost a year before he succeeded in finding the family. The Potters had been hiding in a home in Godric's Hollow with the only person aware of their location being their secret keeper and friend, Sirius Black. Unbeknown to all at the time Black was actually an agent working for He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Black revealed the Potters' location to You-Know-Who, which lead to the attack on the Potter family. Pictured left are Lily and James Potter along with Sirius Black.

Harry had never seen a picture of his parents before. Even though the picture was just in black and white, it was the greatest thing in the world.

~*~

For the next several days Harry continuously returned to the library to look at the picture of his parents. He didn't dare take the book out of the library since he would never want to return it. Finally at the end of the third day of Harry's trips to the library, he did the unthinkable. Harry ripped out the page with his parents' picture on it. He quickly slipped the page into the front pocket of his robe and rushed out of the library.

Later in his dorm room, lying on his bed, Harry stared at the picture on the page in front of him. He knew Madam Pince, the Hogwarts Librarian would be furious if she ever learned that he ripped a page out of one of her precious books, but he just had to have that picture. He couldn't keep coming back to the library to continue to look at it on his free time; he needed it for himself.

They were so happy. His parents had the most joyful looks on their faces. His mother had a beautiful smile that looked just like the one Lexi would always give him. She had long straight hair that Harry could imagine was the same shade of red that Lexi's hair used to be. Her eyes, well even though the picture was black and white he could clearly see the joy and happiness reflected through them.

His father was a different story. Harry knew the minute he saw the picture that he looked just like him. His face was the exact same face that Harry saw in the mirror every day, even down to similar frames for their glasses. They had the same messy hair that would always refuse to stay flat, which made him smile since a piece of him so clearly reflected his father. The only difference was Harry had that cursed lightning bolt scar on his forehead, the same scar that had cost him so much throughout his life.

The picture was a wizarding photo which meant that the occupants of the picture were moving. His parents were standing together, looking at one another until they turned and laughed at something the other occupant of the picture, the man who betrayed them, said.

Just looking at Sirius Black's picture made Harry's blood boil, and filled him with a rage he never experienced before. That man was the

one responsible for his lack of parents. He was the reason Harry and Lexi were forced to live with their darling relatives, the Dursleys.

The only thing was the man didn't look like the classic villain, nor did he look like the man pictured in the Daily Prophet. This man had the long shaggy hair of the man pictured in the newspaper, but instead of it being messy and unkempt, his hair was sleek and clean. The man in the Daily Prophet looked old, crazed and insane, where as his picture of Sirius Black he seemed young, vibrant and happy.

It was a lot for Harry to take in. While the picture of his parents was special and something he wanted to treasure forever, he still hated it due to the man featured in the picture with his parents. Perhaps he should use this picture as a lesson to learn. The picture was a reminder to Harry; you can't trust anyone other than your family.

~*~

Harry and Hermione were sitting together in the Great Hall at dinner. Hermione was rambling on about the subject of a recent piece of transfiguration homework, while Harry couldn't get his mind to focus on the conversation. He now only had four days till Lexi's birthday and he was still confused as to what to send her for her tenth birthday.

Suddenly all conversation in the Great Hall stopped. Hermione had even stopped speaking and her attention was turned to the head table. There Harry saw Professor Dumbledore was standing before the assembled students with a grave look on his face.

Once every student's attention was focused on their aged Headmaster he began to speak. "My students I have some grave news," the elderly man said, with his eyes sweeping across the room. "As many of you heard the criminal, Sirius Black, has escaped from Azkaban prison, and as to date there have been no genuine sightings of him in the magical world."

There were a lot of murmurs across the room since what the Headmaster had said was a frequent subject of conversation around the various common rooms. The Daily Prophet had frequent updates listed about the lack of progress in the Black case. This of course led

to many different rumors around the school as to why Black had escaped.

After a few moments of the Headmaster waiting patiently for the talking to cease the hall was once again completely silent.

“Yes, I can see that many of you are keeping up with recent events affecting the wizarding world,” the Headmaster stated with an approving look on his face. “Since there has been no contact between Black and the magical world, no one can be exactly sure what his motives may have been for breaking out of the prison. Therefore, the Ministry of Magic has insisted that we take extra precautions around Hogwarts.”

At this point the Headmaster’s face took on a solemn appearance. It was quite clear to the students that whatever the Headmaster had to say, he was not completely in favor of it.

“As of tomorrow afternoon the Guards of Azkaban will be posted outside of the school entrances to protect us from Sirius Black in case he should decide for whatever reason to come to Hogwarts.” This time when the murmuring began the Headmaster raised his hand to stop it, so he could continue. “The Dementors of Azkaban are not to be trifled with; therefore, I must warn all of you to be stringent in following the school rules. The rules are there for your protection.”

“While they will not be on school ground, I feel it is necessary to inform you. The Dementors do not discriminate; anyone out of bounds attempting to enter the school will be apprehended by them. They are not fooled by disguises or invisibility cloaks.” Headmaster Dumbledore stared directly at the Gryffindor table as he finished his speech. “The Dementors do not care if whether or not you are their intended target. A student of this school will be treated in the same manner as a criminal being appended by them.”

“So please, I urge you to follow the guidelines of our school,” the smile returned to the elderly man’s face. “Thank you for your attention and please enjoy your desserts. “

“Harry!” Hermione hissed as soon as the Headmaster had sat down at the head table. “We better get to the library right away. If we don’t get there soon, we will have to wait in line for a book about the Dementors.”

Reluctantly Harry rose from the table and followed Hermione out of the Great Hall. Harry guessed that he could miss dessert to learn more about these strange creatures that would be at Hogwarts to protect them from Sirius Black.

~*~

As transfiguration class was wrapping up for the day Harry continued to dwell on his dilemma. Lexi’s birthday was in two days, by now Harry realized what the only thing he had to give his sister for her birthday. The only thing was it was hard for him to do so. It was going to be a challenge for him to give up the one thing of his parents that he had. But Lexi needed it just as much as he did.

Harry sighed as he packed up his school bag. It wasn’t like Harry would never be able to see it again. He would be able to look at it once he went home for Christmas, and perhaps during break he could go to Diagon Alley and purchase a copy of that book so he could have his own copy of the picture of his parents. This wasn’t the end of the world; it was merely the right thing for him to do.

When the bell rang Harry got up from his seat and started to follow Hermione out of the room. However, the stern voice of Professor McGonagall stopped him in his tracks. “Mr. Potter, I need a word with you before you leave.”

Hermione turned around and gave Harry a questioning look, Harry just shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he had no idea what this was about. Hermione slowly turned around and exited the room last, closing the door behind her.

Harry was in no hurry to reach Professor McGonagall’s desk. He had no idea why he was being held after class, but for some reason he couldn’t understand he thought it couldn’t be good.

Then a sinking feeling began in Harry's stomach. Maybe Madam Pince found out that he had damaged one of her books. For all Harry knew an alarm could have been set off the minute he pulled the page out of the book. But if that was the case, why did it take so long for them to approach him about it?

Harry took a deep calming breath. "You need to speak with me, Professor?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter," the usually stern look on her face was gone. In its place was a look of sadness. "I have some bad news. Due to the addition of the Dementors to the security of the school, several additional measures have to be taken. I'm sorry to say, Potter, but the Headmaster has decided to revoke his permission for you to be on the Gryffindor Quidditch team."

Harry knew in that instance his heart stopped as his face fell into a look of total despair. Quidditch was his life at Hogwarts. All he had here was school work, Hermione and Quidditch. Now that he didn't have Quidditch anymore, what would Harry do with himself?

"Do they think Black is coming after me?" Harry asked without thinking.

"Why would you assume that, Mr. Potter?" Professor McGonagall countered with a floored look on her face.

"Well, Black was the one who told Voldemort where my parents were." Harry replied in a matter of fact tone. "He is the reason Voldemort went to my house. I don't know why Black would want me, but it is likely he does if the Dementors were placed around the school and now I can't play Quidditch."

"Yes, Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall hesitantly confirmed. "We do believe if Black comes to Hogwarts, he would indeed be after you. We would prefer that you stay in the castle until Black has been captured."

"Of course, Professor," Harry began. "Why do they think Black may come here?"

"There have been several sightings of Black reported around Hogsmead, and even though the ministry cannot confirm any of these sightings to actually be Black, it was decided by the Board of Governors for us to be safe instead of sorry." Professor McGonagall seemed to personally disagree with the governors' decision by the change in her tone towards the end of her statement.

"I understand," Harry quietly said, his head facing the floor. "Is there anything else, Professor?" Harry asked desperate to leave the room.

"No, there isn't," McGonagall said with concerned look on her face. "I really am sorry, Mr. Potter. I was looking forward to you playing for Gryffindor. You remind me so much of your father. It would have been a real joy to see a Potter playing for Gryffindor again."

~*~

Hermione Granger was very concerned for her friend, Harry. It was still odd to consider him her friend after their rocky start, but he definitely was. Ever since Professor McGonagall called Harry aside that morning after class, he had been acting a bit different. While he was never very outgoing, he was acting almost as if he were a bit depressed.

By dinner, Harry was still acting differently and Hermione decided she needed to get to the root of the problem. He hadn't even attended Quidditch practice, and Hermione knew how much he always looked forward to it every day. It was her duty, as his friend, to help him when he was in need.

"Harry," she began turning to face him, "what did Professor McGonagall want?"

"It's nothing that important," Harry replied while still concentrating on the plate in front of him.

Hermione was no fool, she knew what ever was wrong stemmed from his conversation with Professor McGonagall. "Well if it isn't anything important, then you won't mind sharing it with me?"

Harry turned towards her and Hermione thought he was going to snap at her due to the look of hurt on his face. "McGonagall said Dumbledore revoked his permission for me to play on the Quidditch team." Harry had tears forming in his eyes, although Hermione noted, he was not allowing them to fall. "Dumbledore must think it is too dangerous for me while Black is on the loose."

"That is ridiculous," Hermione responded without thinking. Harry's face fell even more than before. "What I mean," Hermione amended, "is that there must be something that can be done so you can still play. You should talk to the Headmaster about it."

"I don't think so," Harry said once again not looking at her. "Why would he change his mind? There is nothing I could say or do to change the circumstances. Black is out there, and for some reason they think he is likely to come after to me now that he is out of jail. Case closed end of discussion."

Hermione, however, had a different attitude on things. "Sometimes, Harry, things are worth fighting for." With that the bushy-haired witch rose from her seat and marched out of the Great Hall with a purpose. She had to show Harry, if you want something bad enough you need to fight for it.

~*~

Finding Professor McGonagall was rather easy. Hermione's Head of House was on her way to the Great Hall for dinner and it was quite easy to intercept her in the Entrance Hall.

"Professor McGonagall!" Hermione called preventing her from entering the Great Hall. "Could I please speak to you about something important?"

"Of course, Miss. Granger," the stern Professor replied. "What can I do for you?"

"It's about Harry," Hermione quickly blurted out. "I'm afraid that there is something wrong with him."

"What may that be?" the Professor asked, her concern was evident.

"Harry hasn't been himself since his meeting with you earlier," Hermione began only to be cut off by Professor McGonagall.

"Miss. Granger, I know where you are going with this," Professor McGonagall said with a frown on her face. "But I'm afraid there is nothing that can be done about the Headmaster's decision. It is far too dangerous for Mr. Potter to be on the grounds unsupervised by a professor and that unfortunately means no Quidditch for him, even though it pains me to admit so."

"That's why the boy wasn't at practice!" The surprised voice of Madam Hooch rang through the Entrance Hall. "I was worried something had happened to him."

Neither Hermione nor Professor McGonagall had heard the new arrival's approach and both were taken by surprise in Madam Hooch's inclusion in their conversation. Hermione, however, recognized that perhaps Madam Hooch was the ally she needed to get Harry reinstated on the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

"It is such a shame that Harry can't play anymore due to there being no professor volunteering to supervise the Gryffindor team practice," Hermione carefully chose her words. "Quidditch gives Harry such joy it is as if Harry was born to be in the air."

"That it is," Madam Hooch readily agreed. "It would be a crime for Potter to be prohibited from playing." Madam Hooch seemed to be considering something while Hermione crossed her fingers.

"Be as that may," Professor McGonagall continued, "there is nothing we can do about it."

"Actually, Minerva," Madam Hooch interrupted. "All Potter needs is a professor to supervise the Gryffindor practices to make sure nothing hinky happens to him, right?"

"Well, yes," Professor McGonagall said taken a back.

“Well, you’ve got your professor!” Madam Hooch exclaimed to a confused Professor McGonagall and a beaming Hermione. “I usually watch part of their practice anyways. It wouldn’t be an imposition for me to stay there the whole time Potter is in the air.”

A gracious smile crossed Professor McGonagall’s face. “Thank you, my friend; you’ve just made an entire house of students extremely happy.”

“It’s nothing,” Madam Hooch replied unable to hide her blush.

“Well then, the only thing left to do would be to tell Mr. Potter and the Headmaster of our arrangement,” Professor McGonagall said in an almost giddy tone.

Audrey the fifth-year prefect had told Hermione that Professor McGonagall was always a bit Quidditch-crazed but Hermione had never witnessed it, and it was hard for Hermione to imagine her stern transfiguration professor as an obsessed fan. However, now that they had found a way for Harry to play, Hermione could see a bit of what the older girl had been telling her about.

Professor McGonagall led the procession into the Great Hall. Hermione just looked on with wide eyes as her stern professor skipped all the way to the head table. Luckily Hermione had reached Harry before the shock over took her and she felt the need to sit down.

“What’s going on?” A confused sounding Harry asked her, unable to take his eyes away from Professor McGonagall.

“Hopefully, something that will make you very excited,” Hermione vaguely replied. She would hate to tell him now, only to find out Professor Dumbledore had vetoed their plan.

Both students watched the head table along with the majority of the school. A skipping Professor McGonagall was something Hogwarts had never seen before. After a minute Hermione saw the Headmaster

nod his head in agreement to what was being said and Hermione grabbed Harry's arm and gripped it tight.

Professor McGonagall, followed by Madam Hooch, started to skip again, this time directly towards Harry. Since Hermione had only seen Professor McGonagall skipping from behind before, she wasn't aware of the large grin she had on her face the whole time, now that Hermione was in full view of it.

"She looks like the cat that caught the canary," Hermione said to herself, but she heard Harry try to stifle a laugh as well.

"Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall said once she stopped in front of Harry, Hermione's grip on his arm was nearly cutting off the circulation. "I have some exciting news for you. Madam Hooch has agreed to supervise all of the Gryffindor team practices, therefore, the Headmaster agreed to reinstate you to the team."

"Thank you, Madam Hooch," Harry choked out.

"Think nothing about it, Mr. Potter," Madam Hooch said in a dismissive tone, but with a wide grin on her face.

Shortly thereafter both Madam Hooch and a still skipping Professor McGonagall returned to the staff table.

"What did you do?" Harry asked.

"Harry," Hermione said, loosening her grip on his arm, "sometimes you need to fight for what is important to you."

Harry nodded his head, agreeing with her point while they both shared a smile.

~*~

Lexi walked down Magnolia Crescent with a large smile on her face and a big black shaggy dog by her side. Hedwig had just delivered her birthday present from Harry and she couldn't wait to open it. Snuffles, her companion, had suggested that Lexi should wait until

she reached the privacy of the park before she opened the gift. Now she was bouncing for joy barely able to contain herself as she approached the park.

After what felt like forever, Lexi made it to the park and ran, along with her four-legged friend, to the edge of the line of trees. As she ran, she came across Malcolm and the rest of Dudley's gang as she crossed the park. They ignored her like they had been doing since that glorious day in the alley.

Once they were safely covered by the trees, the grim like dog turned into an extremely thin man with long shaggy black hair and dull gray eyes. The man seemed nearly as excited about Harry's gift as Lexi was.

"So, what do you think your big brother sent you for your birthday?" the man asked with nearly unhidden glee.

"Come on, Snuffles!" Lexi replied with a laugh. "I don't need to guess! It is right here in front of me!"

"What did I say about you calling me, Snuffles?" the man asked, fake anger laced in his tone. "Call me Padfoot while I am in human form."

"Yeah, yeah," Lexi said in a dismissive tone as she gingerly opened the package.

When Lexi opened the packaging only two pieces of paper fell out, taking Lexi by surprise. She at least thought Harry would give her something special now that he was at Hogwarts. Maybe Harry had spoiled her by sending her the books at the beginning of term, but it was almost a letdown not to get something incredible from him.

Opening the first sheet of paper, she realized it was a page out of a book. The first side she looked at didn't seem like anything spectacular. It just was some writing about some guy named You-Know-Who. But when Lexi turned it over she let out the breath she didn't know she was holding. In her hands she had a black and white picture of three people. One of the men she recognized as Sirius, her

godfather, but the other man and the woman, it was almost too much to even consider.

Instead of speculating, Lexi just handed the sheet of paper over to Sirius.

"What's this, kiddo?" Padfoot asked as he looked at the picture, while Lexi remained silent. "Oh, I remember when this was taken," Sirius said with a faraway look on his face. "It was just after we graduated Hogwarts, before we all started to work for the Order."

"Are they..." Lexi began before she faltered in her question. Taking a calming breath, she tried again. "Are they my parents?"

"Yeah, kiddo," Sirius quietly replied. "That's Lily and James."

Lexi carefully took the picture back from Sirius, and began to study it closer. Tears started to well up in her eyes. She was an idiot. Of course her brother would get her the one gift that would be more special than anything else in the world.

After what seemed like forever, Lexi finally put the picture in her school bag and unfolded the letter.

Dear Lexi,

Happy Birthday Lexi!

You would not believe how crazy the last few days have been. Remember how I told you Hermione Granger is now my friend? Well she did something simply amazing for me after the Headmaster decided I should go on the school grounds due to this criminal named Sirius Black...

Lexi tore her eyes away from the letter as she fell onto the grass due to her laughter. Not for the first time did she wonder how her brother would take the truth about Sirius Black when he came home for Christmas.

~*~

A/N: Well here is the end of the seventh chapter. Please don't kill the author for the short first meeting between Lexi and Sirius. I didn't want to go through everything on why Sirius escaped quite yet. I did give you enough clues to figure it out if you wanted to, between previous chapters and this one. But I do promise to fully explain everything once Harry comes home from Hogwarts. I hate stories where everything is spelled out numerous time by the same character to each new one he or she meets. So I refused to do that. The meeting with Harry/Sirius/Lexi is far more interesting than just the Sirius/Lexi one.

I must thank everyone who reviewed last chapter. I got over 30 reviews and I was in shock with the turn out and the wonderful words and critiques. I really never thought anyone would be interested in my story. A big thanks to zephy for her amazing beta skills.

Foria

Next Chapter: The Bonds of Friendship

Chapter 8: The Bonds of Friendship

In late October, Harry and Hermione were enjoying a quick breakfast together before Harry had Quidditch practice. Mail on Saturday morning was infrequent as compared to the rest of the week, but it did happen on occasion. That was why both Harry and Hermione were taken by surprise by the large eagle owl that landed in front of Harry that morning.

The letter attached to the owl's leg was clearly addressed to Harry; however, the simple fact that a different owl delivered Harry a letter was surprising since the only owl he ever received mail from was Hedwig. As if thinking about her, made her appear, Hedwig landed on Harry's shoulder, hooting at the other owl.

Hermione, who had been watching the entire procession, simply raised an eyebrow at Harry. Harry shrugged in response; he had no idea what was going on. After staring at the owl for a few more moments, Harry reached forward and took the letter from it. It wasn't like the owl was going to solve any of Harry's confusion towards the situation.

The feel of the parchment in Harry's hands told him it was rather expensive. It was far nicer and delicate than anything he owned or even saw in the stationary store in Diagon Alley. Breaking the seal and opening the letter Harry was a bit surprised considering he had forgotten all about this on the first of September. But it seemed that Gringotts did not forget about their agreement to contact Harry regarding his accounts on a later date.

Dear Mr. Potter,

As per your requested, we completed a complete audit of your holdings with our institution to prepare a report of your current standings. Unfortunately, during the process of this audit we came across several irregularities, hence the delay in contacting you. Due to the nature of these irregularities we, the goblins of Gringotts, would like to request an audience with you and your sister at your earliest convince.

Please owl us with a date and a time that will be suitable for you.

May Your Gold Always Flow,

Ragnok

Manager of Gringotts Wizarding Bank, London

Harry read the letter over for a second time. It seemed pretty straight forward, there was something wrong with his account, and they needed to discuss it with him. However, it had him very worried. What if there wasn't enough money for Lexi and him to attend Hogwarts all seven years?

Deciding there was nothing Harry could do about it at the current time; he handed the letter to the curious Hermione and tried to push the matter out of his mind.

"This is strange, Harry," Hermione commented as she finished a complete read though of the letter.

"What's strange?" Harry asked wondering if perhaps Hermione may be able to determine the subject of the meeting he knew he couldn't be able to make till the end of the winter term.

"It's just who sent this letter," Hermione commented as she read through the letter again. "Ragnok, the manager of Gringotts, is actually the leader of the goblin nation here in England. I'm just surprised he is involved with your account at Gringotts."

Hermione handed Harry the parchment once again, which he began to stare at it curiously, wondering what this could all be about.

"Umm, Harry?" Hermione asked in trepidation. "I think the owl is waiting for your reply."

Harry looked up and noticed, that yes, the owl seemed to be standing in front of Harry awaiting his response. After borrowing parchment and a quill from Hermione, Harry wrote out a quick reply letting Ragnok know he and Lexi would visit Gringotts as soon as possible

during the Christmas break. He also told him that he would owl closer to the date with more specific information on when they would be able to meet.

Once the owl departed, Harry noticed the time and reluctantly rose from his unfinished breakfast, to head to practice. Now he was beginning to understand why the other members of the team hated Wood's early Saturday morning practices.

~*~

While Harry attended Quidditch practice, two owls traveled at a rapid pace to the quiet muggle street of Privet Drive. Both owls, being highly intelligent knew immediately it was a muggle settlement and knew to act with caution around it. Those muggles never knew how to properly respond in the presence of magical owls.

A little after noon, both owls arrived and waited for the one named Alexa Potter to leave the residence. The eagle owl wanted to go in an open window to deliver its burden, but the snowy owl would not let this newcomer make things difficult for one of her masters. It was nearly an hour before the small girl stepped out of number four.

The eagle owl swooped down in front of the surprised girl, followed by her familiar snowy. The girl took the parchment from the eagle owl's leg before it took off heading east.

~*~

Lexi Potter continued to stroke Hedwig, who was perched on her shoulder, that strange eagle owl delivered an even stranger letter before quickly taking off.

Dear Miss. Potter,

It is my duty to inform you that during a routine audit performed on your family account, several irregularities have appeared. Gringotts has requested a meeting with you and your brother in the near future. Once the meeting has been arranged, we will notify you with the date and time.

May Your Gold Always Flow,

Ragnok

Manager of Gringotts Wizarding Bank, London

Lexi held out the letter for her godfather to read once he approached her and turned into his human form.

"Well this is peculiar," Padfoot said while rubbing his chin. "I've never heard of account irregularities at Gringotts before."

"Should I be worried?" Lexi asked with wide eyes.

"Nah," Sirius said in a dismissive tone. "Even if the Potter family ended up being flat broke, there is always the Black family money for you and Harry to survive off of for several decades."

"But Padfoot," Lexi said with a bit of panic in her tone. "The Black family is your family, not ours."

"Of course, it is yours," Sirius said with a bewildered look on his face. "You and Harry are my godchildren. It is my job and responsibility to care for you, alright?"

Lexi nodded her head in agreement, too choked up to speak. It was a strange thought to think that any adult was responsible for her or Harry who actually wanted to be.

~*~

Later that same afternoon, Hermione and Harry were studying at their favorite table in the Gryffindor common room. Hermione kept glancing at Harry out of the corner of her eyes. She hadn't said anything earlier but there was one other item in the letter from Gringotts that was confusing her. In the letter it reference that Harry had a sister, and Harry never made any indication that there was something wrong with this information.

Yet, every book Hermione had read never mentioned another Potter child, and in most cases the books actually claimed that Harry Potter was the only child of Lily and James Potter. Needless to say this new development was completely confusing to Hermione. She desperately wanted to ask Harry what it was all about, but she didn't know how he would react to her questioning him about it. It wasn't too long ago that Hermione didn't trust anything when it had to do with him, she didn't want to head down that road again.

"Hermione, what is bothering you?" the concerned voice of Harry Potter broke through Hermione's thoughts.

Hermione bit her lip unsure what to do, eventually she realized since he asked, she might as well tell him. "I've been a bit confused by something I read in your letter earlier today."

"Really, what was it?" Harry asked, with a look of confusion on his face.

"The letter mentioned that you have a sister," Hermione hesitantly replied. "In all my readings about you and your family, I have never seen a source that referenced that you had a sibling. So, it's just been a bit confusing..." Hermione trailed off the ending not sure where this conversation was likely to go.

"I know what you mean," Harry agreed with a nod of his head. "I just figured people were either just not that interested in checking the accuracy of all their facts or they merely didn't care about my sister since she wasn't the 'Boy-Who-Lived.'" Harry made quotation marks with his fingers when he gave his oh, so hated title.

Hermione couldn't help but giggle, now that she knew Harry much better she couldn't help but realize how thick she had been at the beginning of term. It was quite obvious to all that cared to pay attention that Harry Potter hated all of the fame associated with his scar.

"Sorry," Hermione replied a bit sheepishly once she got her giggling under control. "Like I said, the books didn't say anything so I wasn't

sure. What's her name? What is she like? How old is your sister? Are you two close?"

"Wow, one question at a time," Harry replied holding his hands up in a pacifying manner. "Let me see, my sister is absolutely amazing, and really smart. She is my best friend. Her name is Alexa Lily Potter, but I call her Lexi. She just turned ten at the beginning of the month, so that means she won't be coming to Hogwarts until our third year. Our relatives, the Dursleys don't like us very much since we're magical, so it really has been just the two of us verses the rest of the world. That has made us really close. It's been horrible being away from her, but she insisted I go to Hogwarts and make her proud."

"You really considered not coming?" Hermione was shocked by the last thing Harry said. Hermione couldn't imagine not going to Hogwarts.

"Well, like I said, our relatives don't really like us," Harry said not meeting Hermione's eyes. "I really didn't want to leave her all alone with them and not be able to get to her if she needed help. Besides, Hogwarts is great, but it's not as wonderful as being with my sister, which I would have been if I attended Stonewall High, the school I was scheduled to attend before Lexi convinced me to go here."

Hermione was a bit shocked, what would the wizarding world have done if Harry Potter had refused to go to Hogwarts?

"So, what else is there about your family?" Hermione asked before she quickly added, "And I'll tell you about mine as well, but there isn't much to say since I'm an only child."

Hermione got comfortable in the stuff chair she was sitting in as she listened to Harry matter-of-factly tell her all about his home life and his magic-hating relatives. The more information he shared, Hermione was able to form a better picture of his home life before Hogwarts and it didn't seem very good at all.

~*~

Hermione had followed Harry to Quidditch practice on Tuesday afternoon. Harry always secretly wondered what Hermione did while he was at practice, since she usually spent every waking minute of the day with him. However, this afternoon he didn't have to wonder.

Hermione sat next to Madam Hooch in the stands. From what Harry could tell by sneaking the occasional glance, Hermione spent most of the practice watching the flying and talking to Madam Hooch. Once in a while when he looked over she was reading a book she must have bought along with her.

When practice was over and the Quidditch balls were rounded up, Harry landed near the stands on his Nimbus 2000. Wood had recommended that particular model as perfect for a Seeker to use and he loved it. Thankfully, he had no problem purchasing it due to the funds his parents left him.

"That last catch was simply amazing, Harry!" Hermione practically shouted, as Harry approached the stands where Hermione and Madam Hooch were seated.

"It certainly was," Madam Hooch agreed.

"Thanks," Harry replied with a bit of a blush forming on his cheeks. He didn't want to come straight out and ask Hermione why she attended his practice, even though they had been closer since their conversation on Saturday, but he was dying to know.

"Well Miss. Granger," Madam Hooch began, "if you and Mr. Potter want to fly together you'd better get started."

Hermione at least had the decency to blush as she walked with Harry on to the Quidditch pitch.

"Sorry," Hermione explained in a low voice, "I don't like hanging around the common room alone. Ron Weasley can be such an ass. So, I came with you to practice, but Madam Hooch questioned me on why I was here."

At this point Hermione grabbed Harry's arm and turned him towards her. "I guess I panicked and didn't want to admit to her why I was here, so I told her I wanted you to help me with my flying. I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not," Harry replied, a smile overtaking his face, as he patted her shoulder. "I'd be glad to help you. What is your major issue with flying?"

"Well," Hermione began, "I guess it could all stem from not really liking heights. I don't feel all that comfortable in the air."

"That's a big issue," Harry responded with a solemn look on his face. "The only way you can overcome it is by practicing you know."

"I realize that," Hermione said in her 'bossy' tone, "And Madam Hooch is proud of me for taking initiative to persevere in the air."

Harry chuckled, "Okay, Hermione, are you ready to get started?"

"Sure," Hermione replied, although her face seemed to disagree. "Should I get a school broom?"

"Nope," Harry firmly responded, "no need. You'll be riding on my broom with me."

Hermione's eyes widened as Harry's statement sunk in. If it wasn't so serious, Harry would have been hard pressed to hold back his laugh at Hermione's reaction.

"You won't be doing any fancy flying with me on the broom, right?" Hermione asked with genuine concern.

"I will only do what you feel comfortable with," Harry quickly replied. He really wanted to help his friend, and the last thing he wanted to do was make her fear flying. "We'll stay low and slow until you tell me otherwise."

Hermione shot him a brilliant smile before nodding her head in agreement. Harry steadied his broom so he and Hermione could get on it.

The Potter School of Flying had its first lesson.

~*~

“Did you see that, Fred?” George Weasley asked his twin brother after they made their way back up to the castle.

“Yeah, I did, George,” Fred readily replied. “Looks like Ronnie-kins was right about that Potter boy. At first I thought he was just being his usual jealous prattish self, however it does seem that he was right where Potter was concerned.”

“I would hate to admit to Ron that he was right,” George said with a frown on his face, kicking the gravel on the walkway. “But he was. Looks like the teachers do allow Potter special privileges for being who he is. No other firsty would be allowed to fly outside regulated school times, not to mention they let him on the Gryff team.”

“No one can argue that the boy has talent,” Fred agreed with his brother, “but its not exactly fair that they let him on a school team while no other firsty was even allowed to try out for their house’s team.”

“Oh, my dear brother!” George said dramatically, while brining his hand to his forehead. “What on earth shall we do?”

“Why what we always do,” Fred replied with a grin that was a tad bit too feral. “We will make his life a living hell.”

“Too right, brother of mine,” George replied with his own malicious grin. “Before we were punishing the sap for messing with our baby brother, now we have to show him that there will be no favoritism for rich snobs at Hogwarts.”

Fred saluted his brother with a serious look on his. “For if we don’t tell the snobs they are being assholes and the world does not revolve

around them, then sadly no one will. That is our mission in the world.” George pretended to wipe a fake tear away, as Fred continued. “However, we will have to postpone the pranking until after the first match. Don’t want Wood to nail us to the wall for pranking the Seeker near a match.”

George pretended he was marking a list on his hand, as he began, “So we continue our Quidditch assault of the prat, and then move into pranking around mid-November.”

“Sounds about right to me, brother of mine,” Fred replied with a grin once more.

“That prat won’t know what hit him,” George said before breaking out into an evil laugh that his twin joined in moments after he began.

~*~

The morning of October 31st was damp and drizzling. It was as if the weather was sympathizing with Harry’s current mood. This was the first year that Harry knew the day his parents had died. Which meant it was the first time he ever had the opportunity to mourn them on the anniversary of their death. In all honesty, Harry had no idea how he should respond to this day.

After rising and performing his morning routine, Harry walked down to the common room to be greeted by an entirely too perky Hermione.

“Happy Halloween, Harry!” Hermione joyfully cried, as they began to walk towards the Great Hall. “Oh today is supposed to be simply wonderful,” the young witch began to gush, “after classes we have the Halloween feast. Audrey told me last night in one of the girls loo, that last year they had a ghoulish band perform for the students. Wouldn’t that be fascinating to see?”

Harry had to bite back his initial reply. He really could care less about the feast that evening, and was seriously considering not attending. Why would he want to celebrate a fibrous holiday on the anniversary of his parents’ death?

"It sounds lovely, Hermione," Harry answered in a flat tone of voice.

Hermione immediately stopped and grabbed Harry's arm to stop him as well. "What's wrong?" Hermione asked with concern reflected in her eyes.

"It's Halloween," Harry simply answered, hoping he wouldn't have to explain things in further detail.

"Oh my," Hermione's eyes lit up with comprehension, "I'm so sorry I forgot, Harry."

"It's nothing," Harry attempted to dismiss Hermione's concern. "I mean it's not like it affects you in anyway."

"You don't mean that do you?" Hermione asked in low voice, after getting no response she clarified. "If it affects you, it affects me, so it is something important to me as well."

"I guess you're right," Harry conceded. "It just feels so strange. I never knew when they died before, so I'm not sure how I am supposed to act."

"You act anyway you feel like," Hermione said with a warm smile on her face. "There is no set way people act when they mourn someone they lost. People just do what feels natural to them."

After a few moments of silence, Hermione broke it with a question. "Does Lexi know about today?"

"Yeah," Harry said with a smile crossing his face at the thought of his sister. "I told her as soon as I knew more details about how our parents died. I wish I could be there with her," Harry began wistfully, "the Dursleys never recognize anything to do with us, so she'll be alone in her mourning. At least I have you."

Hermione shot Harry a wonderful smile. Having a friend at Hogwarts was the best thing in the world.

~*~

After school that afternoon, Lexi skived off her chores. She knew there would be hell to pay when she eventually returned to Privet Drive, but that didn't matter to her. She had plans with her godfather, Sirius Black, and that took precedent over anything the Dursleys wanted her to do.

Sirius in his 'Snuffles' form was waiting for her just outside the gate to the school yard. Even though Dudley and his gang had moved on to other schools, their presence was everlasting. No one her age wanted to have anything to do with her for fear that Dudley's gang would find them and punish them for doing so.

Lexi was beyond caring how the other students treated her. It just didn't matter anymore. She had survived years of being tormented and teased by her peers. And now in just two short years she would be escaping all of it to go to Hogwarts. Life would be so wonderful at Hogwarts compared to life on Privet Drive. She would be able to learn about magic and make new friends like Harry did. It will be glorious.

Once Lexi reached Sirius, he began to walk quickly towards the park. Lexi had to run to keep up with him. She knew that he had been anticipating this day just as much as she had been but he really needed to slow down. Dudley's gang had been watching her closely to see when she wasn't accompanied by Sirius in either his man or dog form. Lexi didn't want to know what they would do if they found her alone, since Sirius had threatened them many times in both forms.

After entering their secluded area, Sirius transformed back into his true appearance, "Alright, I need you to hold on to my hand. This is going to feel like we are being pressed into a tube, but the more times we do it, the easier it will be." Pausing for a moment, he continued, "You might want to shut your eyes. Sometimes it's easier on your first trip if you do."

Closing her eyes shut with as much pressure as she could, Lexi blindly reached out her hand for Sirius to take. After feeling his large, strong hand around her own, the whole world turned upside down. Sirius wasn't joking when he said it would feel as if she was being pressed into a tube. But not only did she feel the pressing and

spinning there was a sense of weightlessness as well. When the spinning and pressing finally stopped, Lexi was able to feel the sensation of the soft earth under her feet.

“We’re here,” the gruff voice associated with Padfoot announced. “It is safe for you to open your eyes again.”

Hesitantly, Lexi did as she was told. Sirius had never lied to her in the last month and a half that they knew each other. She highly doubted he would start doing so now just for a laugh. Opening her eyes, Lexi took in her surroundings. They were standing on the outskirts of a quiet village in a wooded area near a cemetery. The wooded area followed the road to the village and where she could see several houses in the distance so they could stay in the cover of the woods for a quiet a distance.

“This is where my parents lived?” Lexi asked, unable to keep the amazement out of her voice.

“For a time,” Sirius replied. “They were living with Harry here in an Order safe house when your mother went into labor with you. This isn’t the location of their first home; it was burnt down by Death Eaters several months before you were born.”

Lexi didn’t care about the details. There was only one thing that mattered, her parents had lived here.

“So, this is Godric’s Hollow,” Sirius continued as they walked along the street. Once they were in an open area he would have to shift into his ‘less wanted’ form of a grim like dog. “They buried your parents in the cemetery just over there, and they left the house Lily and James died in the way it was. I doubt the wizarding world will ever let anyone rebuild over it.”

“How do you know all this?” Lexi hated asking but since Sirius was in jail when all this happened it seemed odd that he knew about what occurred during his incarceration.

“One of your neighbors is a squib,” at Lexi’s confused look Sirius further explained. “That means she was born with no magic to a

magical family. She receives the wizarding newspaper, The Daily Prophet, and she isn't too careful with it. Just about every other day I nick a recent copy of the paper out of her rubbish."

A branch suddenly snapped a bit to their left. Sirius stopped talking and indicated to Lexi not to speak. After waiting a few moments there were no further noises, nor could they see anything from their current position.

"Must have been an animal," Sirius muttered before he continued their previous conversation. "Since it's the ten year anniversary of Harry's trump over Voldemort, the Prophet did several articles about your family including information on your parents' final resting place. I wouldn't be surprised if there were other people visiting your parents' graves today as well."

Lexi took a few moments to process all the new information she was learning. Sirius did share a lot of information that Harry wasn't very forth coming with. Sometimes Sirius would assume she knew something, since he thought Harry would have told her already. But Lexi could understand why Harry may not want to share his celebrity status with her by letter. But oh, what she would give to be able to talk to Harry once again in person. She hated keeping secrets from him, but there was no way she could tell him about Sirius by owl post.

"Alright," Sirius said once again as they came to the end of the wooded area. "We're at the end of the road. I need you to stay close to me. I'll make sure to walk slowly so it won't be too difficult for you." After receiving a nod in agreement from Lexi, Sirius continued. "First we will go to the location of where the house used to stand. Once we are done there we will travel to the cemetery where your parents are. You understand the plan?"

Lexi had to stop herself from rolling her eyes. They had been talking about the plan for the last week, of course she knew what they were about to do. However, since she knew he was just worried that something might go wrong, she merely nodded her head again.

"Excellent," Sirius said before turning into Padfoot once again.

Small dark-haired girl and large dark-furred dog walked out of the forest together to pay their respects.

~*~

Harry was in a melancholy mood all day. As the time approached for the feast, the last thing he wanted to do was sit in a large crowded room with a bunch of different people, who for the most part didn't like him. It didn't a genius to figure out that the feast just wasn't a good idea for him that evening.

Hermione Granger, in Harry's opinion could be arguably considered a genius so it came to no surprise to Harry that she knew. Hermione understood why Harry really didn't want to go to the feast and supported him in his decision. However, she did one thing that truly surprised him.

"Why don't you pick out an unused classroom for us to hang out it?" Hermione asked after their last class of the day. "I'll briefly stop into the feast and grab some food for us to eat, while we just hang out together."

"But, Hermione," Harry said unable to keep the surprise out of his voice, "weren't you looking forward to the feast tonight?"

"There will be other feasts," Hermione replied in a dismissive tone. "Besides, I'm your friend and what kind of a friend would I be if I let you be alone and miserable on a day like today?"

Harry shot Hermione a smile as he thought about what she said. Hermione was one of a kind.

After returning their school bags to their dormitories, Harry and Hermione left the common room together to perform their prearranged tasks.

~*~

There wasn't much left to the house her parents had once lived in. However, it was nice to see the monument created in memory of her

parents and her brother's accomplishment. The only thing that bothered her was the plaque in front of the statue talked about the Potter family, but it made no mention of her.

Now she and Snuffles were walking around the cemetery looking for the location of her parents' plot. Lexi had to hide her snicker at her thought; she knew Sirius preferred to be called Padfoot when he was in that form. However, she personally loved to tease him as much as she possibly could.

Walking through the various rows of tombstones was not very exciting, however, the final result would be. She just couldn't wait to see where her parents were, even if they wouldn't be there with her.

Sirius had told her that the people we love, and who love us, never leave us. That her parents were watching over her every day from Heaven. Even so, it was still nice to be able to do something to show them, how much she loved them. On their way through the village, Lexi had picked a small bouquet of flowers to place in front of their grave. She hoped that they would like it.

Padfoot, who was a few feet ahead of her, suddenly barked. Lexi ran over to him, to see what he was barking at. There in front of her was her parents' grave.

JAMES POTTER LILY POTTER

BORN 27 MARCH 1960 BORN 30 January 1960

DIED 31 October 1981 DIED 31 October 1981

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death

Lexi reached forward and placed her flowers in front of their tombstone. She didn't know what she was supposed to do now. Looking to Sirius for guidance, she received none. He had his head dipped down to the ground and he seemed lost in his own thoughts. Gathering up her courage, Lexi decided to do what seemed to her like the right thing to do.

"Hi, Mum and Dad," Lexi began in a whisper; "Harry and I miss you. We love you very much and I know Harry would be here if he could. Padfoot came to take care of me while Harry was in Hogwarts. Thanks for making him my godfather. I don't know what I would do if I was all alone this year. I wish you were here with me."

Lexi waited patiently for Sirius to finish. There wasn't much for her to say since she never knew them. Sirius on the other hand was their best friend. He had to have a lot more to say to them.

After a few more minutes Sirius finally raised his head up to look at Lexi, as if asking her whether or not she was ready to go.

"I'm all set, Snuffles," Lexi said as they began to walk out of the cemetery. Lexi was slightly ahead of Padfoot at this time.

"You have balls of steel to come here, Padfoot," a voice suddenly ripped through the silence of the cemetery.

Lexi turned around just in time to see Sirius transform into his normal form. Looking her straight in the eyes, Sirius mouthed one word, 'hide'. Lexi didn't need to be told twice.

~*~

Hermione couldn't help but think how nice the evening had progressed, even though she didn't attend the Halloween feast. While it would have been nice to get a better glance at some of the things she briefly saw when she went to the Great Hall for some food. Hermione would have still preferred to be at her current location in an unused classroom on the second floor.

Hermione never had a real friend before. Of course there were people who were friendly with her, mainly to copy off her homework, but never had she had someone like Harry in her life. Most of the other children in her muggle primary school tended to steer clear of her due to her large intellect and because of the weird things that would always happen around her.

She was thrilled to know that the strange things were actually accidental magic and that she would be able to attend a school filled with people just like her. Unfortunately, the other students weren't 'just like her' they were just like the other kids at her old school, just that they were magical.

Now though, everything had changed. She had Harry and wouldn't trade it for the world. They had spent the early evening just talking about everything and anything. It was nice.

"So, what do you think about Professor Quirrell?" Harry asked once their last line of discussion ran its course.

"I'm sure he must be very knowledgeable," Hermione quickly replied, "but it does seem odd to have a Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor who is afraid of his own shadow."

Harry spat out his mouth full of pumpkin juice all over the desk in front of them and unfortunately some on Hermione as well.

"Oh, my!" Hermione cried as Harry started spluttering apologies. "Harry, it's alright!"

"I'm so sorry, Hermione," Harry repeated. "I just didn't expect a comment like that from you."

"Really," Hermione said while placing a hand on his shoulder. "I'm fine. I'll just run to the girl's loo to wash some of this off."

Before Harry had a chance to go into another series of apologies, Hermione was out the door and on her way to the loo. Harry had to be the nicest and most polite boy in the entire school. There was no way a guy like Ron Weasley would ever say they were sorry for accidentally spitting out their juice. Why just earlier that day Ron Weasley had made fun of Hermione for her ability in charms. She and Harry just laughed it off as him being jealous of her.

As she finished dabbing the juice filled parts of her blouse with water and soap the bathroom door swung open. There standing in the doorway was a very large mountain troll. Hermione had read all about

them in Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them. After thinking about the odds of seeing one in the school and how dangerous they were, reality struck Hermione and she did the only thing she could think to do.

She screamed on the top of her lungs.

~*~

A/N: Dum, Dum, Dummmm! I promise the next update will be on Monday. This chapter ended up being so long I unfortunately had to cut it in half. I need to thank everyone who has reviewed this story so far. You guys keep motivating me to write more and update more frequently than I originally planned. Thank you all for the kind words and the critiques. I also need to thank my beta, zephy for all her hard work.

Foria

Next Chapter: What Friends Are For

Chapter 9: What Friends Are For

“Remus, don’t do anything irrational,” Padfoot began with his hands in the universal position of surrender. “This whole thing isn’t what it seems.”

“This isn’t what it seems!” the man Padfoot identified as Remus spat. “Well, then pray tell what is this? Because from where I’m standing, a murderous, traitor is disrespecting the memory of people I loved.”

“I’m as good as responsible for their deaths,” Padfoot conceded. “But I didn’t tell Voldemort where they were. I wasn’t the secret keeper, Peter was.”

“What a bunch of crap!” Remus roared. “Dumbledore told everyone you were the secret keeper, and why would Lily and James hide the truth from me?”

Sirius looked ashamed as he continued his explanation. “We didn’t tell you since Dumbledore told us his suspicions that you were the spy in the Order, due to your long unexplained absences. As for Dumbledore not knowing... Lily and James didn’t trust him towards the end. We thought we were brilliant by having a decoy secret keeper. I’d die rather than tell anyone where the Potters were hiding, and if I were captured, they could never force the information out of me.”

“That’s a lie,” Remus said with a confused look on his face. “Dumbledore had me working for the Order undercover with the werewolves. Everything you’ve just said is a lie.”

Remus raised his wand to Sirius’s face. Lexi panicked and did the only thing that came to her mind. She picked up a rock and began to sneak around behind Remus. If he was going to try to hurt her Padfoot, she’d injure him first.

“I swear to you, on my magic that what I said was the truth as far as I knew it!” Sirius desperately cried. “I would never harm a Potter; I’d rather kill myself first.” After Sirius spoke those words the area around him lit up with a bright, blinding light.

"You made a vow," Remus said with awe in his voice, as his wand lowered towards the ground.

Lexi, however, refused to drop her guard. This Remus had already made a threatening move towards her family, she wasn't about to let him make a sudden attack on Padfoot.

"I'm telling you the truth, Moony," Padfoot reiterated. "Peter was the traitor."

"You killed Peter," Remus flatly stated, "that still makes you a murder."

Sirius barked out a laugh. "I wish I killed that rat bastard! He blew up the street and transformed before I could get a single spell off."

Remus's mouth dropped open with surprise. "What? Eye-witnesses saw you kill him!"

"They saw what Peter wanted them to see," Padfoot said unable to keep the anger out of his voice. "After being sent to Azkaban without a trial, I wish I killed the rat."

"I don't think I can believe you," Remus said. "Your story is such a tall tale."

"I don't expect you to believe me," Sirius said the disappointment evident in his voice. "But just be on the lookout of a rat with a finger missing on his front right paw."

"Padfoot," Remus began, using Sirius's nickname for the first time that evening. "I need to take you in."

Lexi raised the rock, ready to strike the moment Remus raised his wand to perform magic.

"Please," Sirius began, looking straight at Lexi, "there are some things you still don't know about. I promise to tell you one day, but please let me go back to my responsibility."

"Why should I?"

"For the sake of friendship," Sirius simply began. "Not just for myself, but for James and Lily."

"Are you trying to find the rat?" Remus asked curiously.

"No," Sirius bitterly replied. "He's not my top concern."

"Harry?" Remus asked his voice breaking a bit.

Sirius just nodded. "Among other things," was his only audible reply.

"For friendship, Padfoot, but only because you made that vow not to hurt Harry," Remus said putting his wand away. "If you do hurt him in any way, that vow won't kill you, I will," Remus promised before disappearing from the spot.

"Come here, Lexi," Sirius said once he was sure Remus was gone. "We need to get you back to Privet Drive. Then we can discuss exactly what you were planning on doing with that rock."

Lexi put down the rock and walked over to Sirius with her head held high. There was no way Padfoot could cower her into thinking her plan to defend him was in any way wrong.

~*~

Harry jumped at the sound of Hermione's scream. Even though he was several classrooms over from the second floor girl's lavatory, he would know that scream anywhere. Without thinking Harry ran as fast as he could in the direction of the lavatory to help out his friend.

He didn't know what situation he would be walking into but it didn't matter. Hermione was his friend and Harry would fiercely protect her if it was the last thing he did.

As Harry skidded into the girl's loo he came across the most hideous sight. It was twelve-foot-tall, gray creature that looked like it was

made out of granite. The thing was lumpy like a potato but it smelled like Uncle Vernon's dirty socks. Looking straight up at the top of the thing, he realized it had a small head on the top of its large body. Processing all the information Harry had rapidly took in, he realized the thing in front of him was a mountain troll.

This was not a good situation at all. There was no time to run to the Great Hall to get a teacher for help. Hermione was pinned against the wall, her eyes wide with terror as the troll smashed his club in random patterns. The beast seemed to be getting some form of perverse pleasure from Hermione's screams of terror.

Luckily, the troll did not notice Harry's arrival, since its attention was focused solely on Hermione. This gave Harry the briefest amount of time to formulate a plan. Harry need to get Hermione out of the room without either of them being injured by the troll. A feeling of dread that had begun in Harry's stomach the minute he walked into the room started to spread through his body. He tried his hardest to push it down. He was Hermione's only hope of getting out of there alive.

Harry fingered his wand as he looked around the room. The bathroom stalls had already destroyed by the troll. Perhaps he could use that to his advantage...

"Wingardium Leviosa!" Harry roared.

The stall door closest to Harry rose off the ground and went crashing into the side of the troll. A deep scream of pain came forth from the troll as Harry ran as fast as he could to Hermione's position. Unfortunately, the minute he reached Hermione the troll focused his attention back on the two of them.

"That... that..." Hermione began to stutter. "Harry, that was completely reckless! Oh my, I can't believe that actually worked."

Hermione screamed once again as the troll swung its club towards them. Harry threw himself onto Hermione to knock the shocked girl to the floor. It wouldn't do for one of them to get injured now. As far as Harry was concerned half of his objectives had already been fulfilled.

Step one was reach Hermione. Step two was get both of them out of the room.

The troll continued to roar as he swung his club around wildly. It wasn't aiming at anything in particular. This gave Harry an idea.

"Hermione," Harry whispered, "when I count to three, we both need to perform the levitating charm. We will bombard the troll from two different sides to confuse it so we can sneak by it. I will attack it from the left and you attack from the right. We'll use some of the broken debris as our ammo."

"Harry," Hermione said her panic evident on her face. "I can't do this," Hermione began, "What if the troll attacks us? What happens if it all goes wrong?" It was quite clear to Harry that Hermione was being to hyperventilate.

"Hermione," Harry said grapping his friend's shoulders, trying to bring her back to reality. "You can do this. You are a Gryffindor, the sorting hat believes you have courage and so I do. We can do this together."

A look of calm, resolve crossed Hermione's face. "We can do this," she said from her position on the floor as the troll his club over their heads again. "We can do this."

"Ready," Harry asked knowing that it was either now or never. Hermione nodded her head; her newly found confidence was still shining through. Harry took a deep breath, before pulling himself up into a squatting position. Hermione next to him mirrored his actions.

"One," Harry said while picking out the object he would use, still keeping low to avoid the madly swinging club.

"Two," Harry called out. However, before they were able to do anything, tragedy struck. The troll aimed right at their position.

Harry and Hermione as one rolled towards opposite sides of the room. The club narrowly missed the two of them. Harry immediately shot up in a crouching position. He was pleased to see Hermione copy his actions. This may make things more complicated in leaving the room,

but perhaps it was the best. Harry would be able to make sure to draw the troll's attention away from Hermione so she could make it out of the room, then he could worry about himself.

"Hermione," Harry called out, only to see the bushy-haired witch's attention was focused on him. "We're changing the plan. I'll attack the troll while you run to the exit."

"No!" Hermione shouted, cutting Harry off. "I'm not leaving you here alone with the troll."

"Good," Harry quickly replied, as the troll was once again swinging his club madly around the room. "I hoped you would feel that way," Harry sent her a reassuring smile, at his failed attempt at humor. "You go to the door, while I distract the troll. Then you distract the troll to the other side of the room while I make it to the door, deal?"

"Deal," Hermione called out.

"Alright," Harry said, "let's try this again. When I say three, run like there is no tomorrow." After seeing Hermione's nod, Harry began his count down.

"One," Harry called out while eyeing his target.

"Two," Harry looked over and Hermione was in a position that would allow her to easily sprint towards the exit.

"Three!" Harry yelled out as their plan went into action.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" Harry called out. Once again a stall door levitated off the floor and went crashing into the troll as Harry's wand directed it to do. The troll cried out in pain as this time the stall door hit him square in the face.

Hermione did exactly as Harry instructed. She ran towards the exit, barely missing being trotted on by the troll as it contorted around, yelling in pain. Harry was able to move a few feet closer to the door while the troll swung his club blindly in his path and his exit route.

Harry for a moment couldn't believe that the people in the Great Hall didn't hear the noise the troll was making, since it was such a high pitched scream. Yet, no one arrived to help them. At least Hermione was now out of the line of fire.

"Harry," she called out. "Are you ready?"

"Yes," Harry readily replied. He looked around for an alternate route from the easiest and clearest way to the door. Since the troll was now blocking the path, Harry needed a back up method just incase Hermione would be unable to clear the way for him. "Count it down, Hermione!"

"One," Hermione yelled, and Harry pulled himself up in a spiriting position he learned in primary school gym class. It was still questionable whether he would be running straight or to the left, but he positioned himself towards the easiest exit anyways.

"Two," Hermione called out, and Harry thought his heart would rip out of his chest because it was beating so fast.

"Three," she cried followed quickly by, "Wingardium Leviosa!"

The stall wall Hermione used as her target lifted off the ground and rushed at the troll pushing it towards the side of the room that Hermione had run along. This gave Harry the perfect opportunity to run across the room; the easiest way to the door.

Hermione's spell had so much power, that when Harry reached the exit to the lavatory, the troll was still pinned against the wall. Hermione grabbed Harry's hand, breaking the spell on the troll, and the two children rushed out of the room.

"Colloportus!" Hermione called out once they closed the door behind them. Harry could hear the lock of the door click in place. They had the troll trapped alone in the lavatory; they were free.

"I wasn't sure that would work," Hermione said panting. "I had only read about that spell yesterday. I've never actually had the chance to try the locking spell before."

“Well I think it worked beautifully,” Harry replied, panting as well. The adrenalin from their daring escape had yet to leave his system.

“Thank you,” Hermione said suddenly latching her self to Harry in a bone crushing hug. “I was so afraid that I panicked. I was so sure that I was going to die in the loo.” Harry could feel wet spots forming on his shirt collar where Hermione was crying on his shoulder, her head tucked into towards his neck.

Harry did the only thing he could think to do in that situation he hugged her back.

“I did what any friend would do, Hermione,” Harry said still a bit unsure of himself. “Helping one another, that’s what friends are for.”

Before the two children knew it, they had collapsed on the floor, hugging one another, laughing and crying interchangeably. Hermione kept mumbling into Harry’s shoulder her words of thanks, and random comments about how special he was. Harry just kept hugging her, like he would hug Lexi when he was extremely scared or excitedly happy.

The events with the troll in the bathroom had taken less than five minutes to occur. However, it made a lifetime of change in Harry Potter and Hermione Granger’s lives. What neither of them knew at that particular moment was that to Harry, Hermione was no longer just a friend. She was to him, what Lexi was: a best friend, a sister. While Harry became the one thing Hermione never had: a best friend, a younger brother.

There are just some things in life a person shares with some one else, where they can’t help but become closer to one another. Fighting a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them.

~*~

“Lexi, I am shocked by your actions,” the stern voice of Sirius Black rang through their clearing in the park off Magnolia Crescent. “I told

you to hide and I expected you to stay hidden. What were you thinking?" Her

"You needed my help," Lexi said in an eerily calm and controlled voice. "I was there to provide help for you. Whether or not you really wanted it doesn't matter. I don't leave my family unprotected."

"You were about to attack another living being," Padfoot continued. "Nothing is worth doing something like that."

"No," Lexi simply replied. "You're wrong Padfoot. You are worth hurting someone especially if someone was trying to take you away from me."

Sirius stared at Lexi with a slightly stunned expression on his face. He was obviously not expecting something like that.

"What do you mean, Lexi?" Sirius asked after a few moments of silence.

"Well isn't it obvious?" Lexi replied as if Sirius was missing something very important. "You and Harry are my only family. You two are the only people who care about me, and I would do anything to protect you both. That man," Lexi spat, "was trying to take you away from me, and I wasn't about to let him do so."

Sirius stared at the righteous Potter for a few more minutes, before responding to her last statement. He could definitely understand where the young witch was coming from. As far as he was concerned, the Marauders had the same mentality in his youth; the traitor being the obvious exception.

"Lexi," Sirius began, choosing his words carefully, "you are right. A person should always do what they think is best when it comes to protecting or defending their family. However, violence should always be the last resort. There were several other ways you could have handled that situation. Can you think of any?"

Sirius studied Lexi as she stood there a moment mentally reviewing everything that had occurred at the cemetery with Remus.

"I could have made a loud noise," Lexi began, "by throwing a rock against something to startle him enough to give you a chance to run away."

Sirius mulled over the idea. It did have a slim possibility of success, but he didn't really like that her second plan also had some form of collateral damage involved.

"That could work," Sirius conceded realizing that this may not be the best time to bring up her desire to cause damage with rocks. That should be a conversation and a lesson for another day. "Can you think of another possibility?"

Lexi stood before him with her head tipped to the side for several minutes. After what seemed like forever, she finally shook her head 'no'.

"You could have started walking towards him making a lot of noise," Sirius began watching Lexi carefully to see if she was paying attention. "Since Remus had never met you before, he would have no idea on whether you were a witch or a muggle. This would cause him to either attempt to hide his wand, or drop his guard long enough for me to get away. In this scenario, you could still pretend you are not associated with me, and no one would get hurt."

Lexi nodded her head in agreement with a smile on her face. "Padfoot, can I try to think of a few more scenarios that I could have done as well? That was fun."

"Sure, kiddo," Padfoot replied with a grin of his own. "Just one more thing before we head back to the Dursleys. Did you know what you did with your hair back there in the cemetery?"

Lexi gave him a look of utter confusion, which to Sirius was a good sign. If she was what he thought she was, at least she had no idea that she was one of them. It would be easier for her to learn how to use that power quickly.

"Your hair," Sirius began to explain, "wasn't just the normal shade of black it always is. Some of your hair was so dark it was a shade of red." At that last word Lexi's face began to fall. Sirius knew how proud she was of her 'accidental magic' to change the color of her hair to match Harry's own mop of unruly black. "I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with you or your hair," Sirius continued holding his hands up in a pacifying manner. "I just think there could be more to it than accidental magic."

"What do you mean, Snuffles?" Lexi said with a deliberate jab. She knew he wasn't too fond of that nickname.

"What I mean," Sirius began in a controlled voice, trying not to rise up to the brat's bait, "is that this wasn't the first time I've seen your hair slightly off. The day I saw you in the alley where the 'dumb bully squad' was trying to beat you up, your hair had a purple tint to it. Now today when you were angry it had a red tint. That just made me suspicious as to whether or not you knew you were doing that."

"No," Lexi replied while shaking her head, "I had no idea."

"Next time you get really angry or really sad try to catch a glimpse of yourself in the mirror to see what I am talking about," Sirius instructed. With luck she would be the first Potter to show metamorphmagus ability. There had always been hope since Dorea Black married Charlus Potter that the trait would appear in the Potter lineage as well as the Black. If it did with Lexi Potter, it would go a long way in making his life easier.

~*~

"Mr. Potter, Miss. Granger," the stern voice of Professor McGonagall rang through the corridor. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Oh, thank goodness, Professor!" Hermione cried, finally loosening her grip on Harry. Both students were still seated on the hallway floor just outside the girl loo where the roars of the troll could still be heard. "There is a troll in the loo," Hermione continued. "It's currently locked in there but it could escape at any moment."

"What are the two of you doing here instead of returning to your common room with the rest of the children from the feast?" Professor Flitwick, whom neither of the children had noticed right away, questioned.

"We weren't at the feast, Professor," Harry politely informed the small wizard, but before Harry could continue he was abruptly cut off.

"And, why wasn't the perfect Harry Potter at this evening's feast?" the snide voice of Professor Snape cut through the conversation.

Harry looked in the direction that his voice had come from only to see Professors Snape, Quirrell and the headmaster Dumbledore, join their group. Perhaps someone had overheard all of the commotion going on in the girls' loo.

"It is Halloween, sir," Hermione answered for Harry.

"What could be so important on Halloween that would cause the great Harry Potter to miss the feast and his adoring fans?" Professor Snape continued on, with no regard to the looks the other professors were sending him.

"My parents died on this day ten years ago, sir," Harry replied this time. If Snape was going to be an ass to him again, he would not let Hermione get in the middle of it. "There really isn't a reason for me to celebrate on this day. Hermione was here with me to keep me company." To Harry's surprise, the pale face of Professor Snape seemed to turn a bit paler at his words.

"That doesn't answer why both of you are in front of the girls' loo with a troll trapped inside of it," the grandfatherly voice of the Headmaster entered the conversation.

"It was all my fault, Headmaster," Hermione replied with a tone of awe reflected clearly in her voice. It seemed his friend was a bit star struck by their headmaster. "I needed to use the loo to clean my blouse. When I was in here the troll entered as well, and Harry heard me scream and came to help me..."

As Hermione began to explain the very complicated series of events that occurred in the girls' lavatory, Harry was besieged by a terrible headache. While Harry had headaches on numerous occasions during his life, this headache was far different than anything else he had ever experienced. It was a sharp, stabbing pain located on his forehead, directly over his right eye.

This pain was located, Harry realized, over exactly where his scar was positioned on his forehead. The strength of the pain Harry was under was completely mindnumbing. It was like a blinding light was concentrating behind his eyes and he could not escape from the pain or the brightness.

Harry crumbled to the ground as he heard the concerned voices of Hermione and Professor McGonagall, call out to him. Hermione was the first of the people assembled to reach Harry's side.

"Quick," Hermione said in a take charge tone, "we need to get Harry to the Hospital Wing!"

Harry knew he would have been laughing if he wasn't in so much pain. To think, Hermione Granger would attempt to tell the professors what to do. Harry allowed Hermione to help him up, but he wasn't about to be ushered off to the Hospital Wing due to a bad headache.

"Really," Harry said in a bit of a stutter, "I'm alright. I just have a headache."

"Well, be as that may," Professor McGonagall began, "why don't the three of us head to my office to assess Mr. Potter's condition, while the rest of the professors here handle the troll." Professor McGonagall said glaring at the rest of the staff members present, as if daring one of them to contradict her.

"That sounds like the best idea possible," Professor Dumbledore replied with a concerned look reflected on his face.

At once Hermione began leading Harry in the direction of Professor McGonagall's office. The bushy-haired witch did not give anyone else the opportunity to weigh in on what may happen to her friend.

~*~

"Where have you been?" the shrill voice of Petunia Dursley ripped through the silence of number four, Privet Drive as soon as Lexi walked in the door.

"I was out," the young witch snappishly replied.

"You ungrateful freak," Aunt Petunia began. "You are to return home immediately after school every day. You have chores you need to do to earn your keep. Who do you think you are?"

Lexi had enough. She heard the same song and dance anytime she was a little late. While she did concede that today she was extremely late, considering it was seven o'clock in the evening, that didn't mean Lexi was going to take this verbal abuse from Aunt Petunia any more. Lexi could feel the anger radiating off of her.

"I think I am Lily Evans Potter's daughter," Lexi said in a very controlled tone. "And that today is Halloween and I was paying my respects to one of the heroes of my world."

Aunt Petunia was gapping like a fish. "But, how?" Aunt Petunia eventually began once she was able to regain control over her motor skills. "How did you..."

"...know?" Lexi finished for her stunned aunt. "Just because I'm not the one at Hogwarts right now doesn't mean I am ignorant of my heritage. There are people out there that would hate to see me, or my famous brother being mistreated, if you know what I mean."

Lexi knew she laid it on a bit thick, but it was true. Harry was in constant contact with her, even if Aunt Petunia was unaware. Also Sirius hated the way the Dursleys treated her and Harry, however, he wasn't in much of a position to do anything about it for them. All Sirius could currently do is be there as a source of comfort and guidance for her.

“What lies did that boy tell them?” Aunt Petunia demanded even though her complexion had turned as white as a ghost.

“Harry didn’t tell anyone anything,” Lexi replied crossing her fingers behind her back. “Certain people became interested in our home life due to some observations just not making any sense.” Swelling with a strange feeling of courage, Lexi plowed along attempting to achieve an objective she had since Harry left for Hogwarts.

“Did you know that most families living in a four-bedroom house don’t force two of their occupants to live in a cupboard under the main set of stairs?” Lexi asked the question in a matter-of-fact tone, “especially when two of the bedrooms in the house are being used as a guest room and a second bedroom for one of the members of the family?”

Aunt Petunia seemed scared and Lexi didn’t know how she would react to Lexi’s implied threat by the wizarding world. When Aunt Petunia was cornered, she was like a wounded animal; she would fight and claw at anything in her path. Lexi knew that but she had pushed Aunt Petunia anyways. There was no use in trying to back down. Lexi was going to have to see this through.

“Go to your cupboard, now,” Aunt Petunia said in little more than a whisper.

“Go where?” Lexi said with a raised eyebrow. Like Sirius once told her, ‘in for a knut, in for a galleon’.

“To your cupboard,” Aunt Petunia said and Lexi began to feel furious again. “I will talk to your uncle about what you said,” Aunt Petunia had continued.

At least they were talking about it. When Harry came back from Hogwarts there would be no room in that cupboard for the two of them. They needed to move at least to one of the other bedrooms to share, if the Dursleys would not give them their own rooms.

Lexi didn’t follow Aunt Petunia’s orders. Instead of heading straight to her bedroom, she instead took a detour to the small downstairs bathroom. Lexi was so angry at her aunt for not immediately giving in

to her, and was furious that her future living arrangements all depended on the opinion of Vernon Dursley. Needless to say, Lexi was not pleased.

Lexi washed her face with cool water, before looking up at her reflection in the mirror. Sure enough, Lexi immediately noticed what Sirius had been talking about. Some of her hair seemed to change to a shade of red like fire. As Lexi continued to look at it, her hair suddenly changed back to the black hair she normally had. This was definitely an interesting development.

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After walking for a few minutes, Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall made it to the transfiguration professor's office. Hermione proceeded to assist Harry into sitting in the nearest chair, despite his protests. As soon as they had started to walk away from the corridor where the rest of the professors prepared to expel the troll from the school, Harry's headache had suddenly felt better. The farther Harry was away from the other professors, the less pain he had felt until it went away all together.

"Miss Granger," Professor McGonagall began, once everyone was seated. "Why don't you explain the entire situation that occurred earlier?"

As Hermione told the professor about exactly what had occurred in surprisingly detailed accuracy, Harry took the time to reflect upon what may happen if word about the events surrounding the troll became public knowledge. How would the rest of the students treat him? Would they be kinder to him? Or would the other students look at him as more of a freak now than ever?

Harry suddenly noticed the talking had stopped and Professor McGonagall and Hermione were staring at him with very concerned looks on their faces.

"Sorry," Harry sheepishly said, "what did you just say, ma'am?"

"I asked you how you were feeling Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall said, never taking her eyes off him. "Is your headache any better?"

"Yes, Professor," Harry replied, only to further elaborate due to Professor McGonagall's skeptical look. "My headache went away as we were traveling to your office."

"If you say so, Mr. Potter," was Professor McGonagall's firm response. "I want to thank you for what you did, Mr. Potter. I believe your actions were the correct choice to make, even though it pains me to admit it. I never want to see one of my students place themselves in harm's way, but if you did not act quickly, I fear Miss Granger would no longer be with us."

Harry glanced at Hermione out of the corner of his eye. She had tears running down her cheeks once again, however, this time she was smiling at him.

"I only did what I had to do," Harry simply replied. "I didn't think there was enough time to try to find a teacher."

Professor McGonagall nodded her head in agreement. "Mr. Potter, I award you and Gryffindor House fifty points for your courage and quick thinking in a life-threatening situation."

Harry and Hermione both let their jaws drop upon the news. Neither of them had ever heard of one student being awarded so many points at one time.

"And Miss Granger," Professor McGonagall continued, "For your heroic actions and bravery, I award you and Gryffindor House, thirty points."

Eighty points, they had gained Gryffindor eighty points by simply being the wrong place at the wrong time. While Hermione seemed extremely excited by earning the points, Harry didn't think they deserved it.

"I'm sorry, professor," Harry began. "That's all too much." At Professor McGonagall's questioning look Harry continued. "We were

merely in the wrong place at the wrong time. We didn't do anything spectacular to deserve those points. Anyone in my situation would have done the same thing for a friend."

Professor McGonagall stared at Harry for what felt like an eternity before she began to chuckle. "Mr. Potter, you are really a rare type of person. I assure you the points that you have been rewarded are the least of what you deserve for your actions."

Harry, not wanting to argue with a professor, merely nodded his head in agreement instead.

"Now, even though both of you appear fine," Professor McGonagall continued. "I still want Madam Pomfrey to give you both a once over. Is that understood?"

Both students wordlessly nodded their heads.

"Excellent," Professor McGonagall replied. "I shall escort you to the Hospital Wing, and then to the classroom you were both in earlier this evening to collect your belongings. The other staff members should have the troll situation handled by that point in time."

As they were walking down to the Hospital Wing, Harry and Hermione kept sharing the occasional glance. Even facing Madam Pomfrey, the feared Med-witch of Hogwarts was nothing compared to taking on a twelve-foot-mountain troll.

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A/N: Well I hope this clears up some confusion about Harry and Hermione's relationship. This story is strictly Harry/Ginny. They may or may not have other relationships before they get together but they will ultimately be together at the end. Both Harry and Ginny will be different characters by the time they get together due to changes in the plotline this story. My commentary at the end of the fight with the troll was meant to confirm for readers that this is not a H/Hr story, although a lot of people got worried well before this chapter was posted. (I'm approximately four to five chapters ahead in writing, so I

was dying just to say wait for chapter nine! All will be explained there.)

In cannon I always saw Hermione as a sister to Harry. In creating Lexi I was always afraid she would take away from the Harry and Hermione sibling relationship I believe was there in cannon. It was the one cannon aspect I wanted to keep but was afraid I would lose. Hopefully I was able to believably prevent this due to the changes in the story I created so far. The next big hurdle will be Lexi meeting Hermione, and whether or not they will accept each other, in keeping the Harry and Hermione sibling relationship.

Thank you for all of the reviews. The critiques and kind words have been an excellent source of motivation for me. I need to thank zephy for beta skills, you rock. Sorry for the long author notes. I needed to clear up the ship stuff. Also next update won't be till next Monday since I'm entering a busy phase at work. Which means less writing time and only weekly updates till things slow down again. I'm just as bummed as you guys are. :(

Foria

Next Chapter: Quidditch IS War

Chapter 10 – Quidditch IS War

It was only a week before the first Quidditch match of the year. Harry had learned from Oliver Wood, that every year the first game of the Quidditch season was Gryffindor verses Slytherin. According to Wood, those two teams had been the fiercest rivals for the past several centuries. Therefore, it was easiest for the school officials to do that match first to get all of the nonsense rivalry stuff out of the way, not to mention there was always an excellent school-wide turnout to see which team would win.

Apparently Gryffindors and Slytherins alike were equally competitive with their dislike of one another's team. Each strived to hold the yearly record of placing the higher amount of players from the other team in the hospital wing. Katie Bell informed Harry that the busiest time of the year for Madam Pomfrey was not flu season but Quidditch season, especially before the Gryffindor/Slytherin match.

With still a week before the match Harry could certainly see how it was likely for members of the teams to end up in the hospital. It seemed everywhere he turned people were either backing away and whispering about him (due to the troll incident a week before on Halloween) or stare at him menacing since it was well known he was the new Gryffindor Seeker.

Wood had wanted the knowledge of Harry's appointment to the Quidditch team to stay a secret; however that was not meant to be. A week after Harry received his Nimbus 2000, Ron Weasley saw it hidden under Harry's bed in their dorm. While Harry wanted to know why Ron was snooping under his bed, many suggested it wasn't Ron's fault that the information about Harry being on the team got out.

Perhaps it was Harry's fault, like Fred and George constantly suggested, for keeping his broom in his dorm room instead of in the school broom shed. But that didn't matter, Ron Weasley made a big spectacle about Harry having a broom stick in the Great Hall, and the whole school practically discovered that Harry Potter was Gryffindor's Seeker.

The one godsend during this time was Harry's constant companion, Hermione Granger. Without her, Harry didn't know where he would be. It seemed that most 'accidents' with members of the Quidditch teams happened when they were found alone with by members of the other house. Luckily for Harry, Hermione was always by his side, and no one from Slytherin wanted to take on both of the first years who faced a fully grown mountain troll and lived to tell the tale.

At this time Harry and Hermione were on their way to the Charms corridor. They were already two minutes late to the lesson, but it wasn't their fault. They were running late because Wood had stopped Harry to explain a new play to him, and Hermione was not about to leave him alone until all this 'silly Quidditch nonsense' was over. As they hurried around the next bend, they came across the most appalling sight.

Harry's teammate, Alicia Spinnet, was surrounded by a group of about six Slytherin upperclassmen. The Slytherins were lead by Marcus Flint, the captain of the Slytherin Quidditch team, who was notorious for attempting to injure the rival team's players during the week before their Quidditch match as a means of intimidation. From Harry's quick assessment it appeared as though Alicia was somehow wandless, which meant it was very likely that this would not end well for her.

Before he could do anything, Hermione grabbed Harry's arm and pulled him back around the corner they had just walked around. Harry let Hermione lead him away with little protest. Even if Harry and Hermione made their presence known, they would have been outnumbered, two to one. They would at least need a plan.

"Harry," Hermione hissed in a whisper, "we need to get a teacher. We should hurry back to Professor McGonagall to get her to help Alicia."

Since Hermione began to attend watching practices, the girls on the team had taken a liking to Harry's bushy-haired friend. Harry knew that Hermione most likely wanted to go around the corner and hex those poor excuses for students despite what she just said, but of course they didn't know enough spells to do so. Or did they?

"There is no time," Harry quickly replied, matching Hermione's whisper, "we need to act fast or they might injure Alicia. I know," Harry held up a pacifying hand to prevent Hermione from interrupting him, "that Madam Pomfrey can fix any injury, including broken bones in a few hours. But, they want to injure Alicia so Madam Pomfrey will take away her clearance to play in the match on Saturday."

"Wood warned us," Harry continued now that it was apparent that Hermione would let him speak, "that it is a Slytherin team tactic to attempt to injure players of the other team before a match to break up the Chaser formations the team is used to running. If Alicia was injured and we needed a sub, they wouldn't fly in the plays like Alicia would have."

Hermione was silent for a moment, considering what Harry said before she responded. "Be as that may, what can we do to help Alicia?"

"Hermione, do you trust me?" Harry asked looking her straight in the eye. She would have to perform everything just right, or Gryffindor would lose two team members for the upcoming match.

"Of course," Hermione replied. "What's the plan?"

Harry smiled at her. "For the most part you just need to follow my lead. We're going to have to bluff our way through this." Harry leaned in and quickly explained to Hermione the few details of his plan. He crossed his fingers as he did so hoping she would be an excellent actress.

Harry dashed out around the corner only to see the Slytherin students petrify Alicia.

"Now that's not nice," Harry said in a voice calculated to reach the students in front of him. Harry lightly tapped his wand repetitively on the palm of his free hand. The Slytherin students would understand the threat to use the wand at a moment's notice if the situation called for it.

Immediately the brutish Slytherin students turned around, their wands drawn, to face Harry.

"Well, lookie here, boys," the gorilla like boy, Marcus Flint began, "Looks like we'll be decreasing Gryffindor's chances by two!"

"Really?" Harry asked in a condescending tone, "is that so? Cause from where I am standing it looks like it will be Slytherin with the missing team members for Saturdays' match."

Flint and the two other boys who were on the Slytherin team, stared at each other, their confusion clear on their faces. All three boys trying their best to decipher the meaning of Harry's threat, finally after a few seconds, the boys gave up.

"What do you mean by that, Potter?" Flint, the apparent spokesperson of the group finally asked.

"Well there are six of you, against the two of us," Harry said indicating Hermione, "I honestly don't see how you guys have a prayer." The bored tone in Harry's voice came through loud and clear,

Flint began to laugh. "What are you playing at?" When none of Flint's cronies joined in, he turned to them. "What? Why aren't you all laughing?"

"Boss," the one to Flint's direct left began, "he's Harry Potter. He defeated You-Know-Who and I heard he killed the mountain troll with his bare hands on Halloween," the boy's face took on a scared look before he said the last part, "for fun!"

Harry couldn't stop himself from rolling his eyes. That had to be the biggest exaggeration of the story that he had heard yet. However, Flint noticed the action.

"See!" the fifth year yelled, "Look at Potter. Even he acts as though those stupid rumors are just that: stupid rumors!"

"Not really," Hermione spoke up for the first time. "Come on, do you really think a first year could possibly kill a twelve-foot mountain troll

with his bare hands?" A smug look crossed Flint's face, however before he could reply, Hermione continued. "He used magic."

Go Hermione! Harry thought as his grin threatened to split his face in half. No one could ever claim Hermione was slow on the uptake. Harry snuck a glance of her out of the corner of his eye. She appeared to be examining her nails like this whole situation was below her concern. His plan was going beautifully.

"No, Potter couldn't have," Flint replied in a shaky voice, "Professor Snape would have told us so!"

Hermione gave Harry a small questioning glance, was Snape sharing confidential information about students of other houses with his Slytherins?

"Well that's no surprise," Harry said once again adopting his bored tone. "The headmaster wanted to cover it up."

Now the Slytherins looked positively scared. Once again it was Flint who spoke up.

"You're a couple of firsties. There is nothing too dangerous you two can do to us," Flint seemed rather smug with his assessment.

"Actually," Harry said in a drawling tone he had heard Draco Malfoy use on occasion, "I'm quite versatile with my knowledge of spells. You'd be surprised at what people would want to teach the Boy-Who-Lived. I guess many wizards and witches see it as a honor to teach me something new and powerful. Would any of you care to try living the rest of your life as a newt?"

Flint looked like he was about to be sick, but he still pressed on. "But she's a muggle-born! That girl couldn't possibly know anything!"

Hermione laughed a little. "Do you really think Harry wouldn't share with his friends?" Seeing that none of the Slytherins were about to respond to that statement Hermione continued, "He's a really good teacher."

“Let’s get out of here,” one of the boys who had begun inching away from the confrontation said. “This isn’t worth it.”

Slowly the other Slytherins voiced their agreement, until Marcus Flint was the only one left wanting to duel with Harry and Hermione.

“Why don’t you unfreeze Alicia,” Harry began, “and give her back her wand. That way we can each go our own ways and forget this ever happened.”

One of the boys closest to Alicia said the counter curse and another threw her the wand.

“This isn’t over, Potter,” an angry Flint said once it was clear he wasn’t going to get his way.

“I count on it,” Harry replied as Flint and the other Slytherins walked away grumbling.

“Wow,” Alicia said once they were alone in the hallway. “Harry, I had no idea that-”

But Harry cut her off, “Alicia, none of what we said was true.”

Alicia had a shocked look on her face, while Hermione looked frantic and anxious.

“Oh, do you think we’ll get in trouble?” Hermione fretted. “Oh dear, we’re going to be very late to class. What will Professor Flitwick say?”

Just a few moments ago, Hermione was calm and cool; fooling those Slytherins like it was second nature. Now she was the slightly panicky, rule stickler Harry knew and loved.

“If those Slytherins go to a professor because of our threats,” Harry said trying to calm down Hermione, “we can tell them about them freezing Alicia. Because of that, those Slytherins won’t say anything.”

“How can you be sure?” Hermione questioned.

“Positive,” Harry said with a reassuring smile. “I know bullies, my cousin Dudley is one. They won’t do anything to endanger themselves to adults.”

“So you don’t know any advance spells,” Alicia asked in a confused tone. The older witch seemed to have a hard time wrapping her head around this situation.

“Nope,” Harry replied. “We were bluffing.”

“Bluffing?” Alicia repeated in wonder. “What did you hope to accomplish with that?”

“I hoped they would leave you alone and turn their attention to me,” Harry replied a bit reluctantly. “I’m used to bullies and I’m rather fast which makes me hard to catch.”

Alicia looked at Harry with something like awe in her eyes. “Why would you do that?”

“We’re teammates-”

“And friends,” Hermione jumped in now that she was beginning to collect herself.

“And friends,” Harry amended. “I didn’t want those jerks to hurt you if I could stop it.”

Alicia gave Harry a small smile before she leaned in and kissed him on the cheek. “Thanks, Harry,” she replied in a small voice, before turning to Hermione and giving her a hug before repeating the same words of thanks to the other witch.

After sharing her thanks, Alicia turned around and walked away. Seeing as there was nothing more for either of them to do, they continued on their way to class.

“You do realize that the stories about you are only going to get weirder?” Hermione asked as they were walking.

"I sort of figured that," Harry muttered in reply.

"Harry, I have to ask," Hermione said when they were in view of the classroom, "why a newt?"

"It's what Lexi wants me to learn to turn Dudley into," Harry replied with a smile.

Hermione stifled a laugh as the two students walked into their charms classroom. Neither of them realized exactly how much the legend of Harry Potter and his closest friends had gained a new chapter that afternoon, and how much it would impact their future to come.

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"Get in the car," Petunia's shrill voice carried through the house.

Lexi had almost forgotten it was that time of the year again. It was time for her and Harry to visit Mr. Donaldson. Of course Harry wasn't going to be with her this year, however, it would be rather interesting to see what kind of a story Aunt Petunia was going to come up with to cover up Harry's absence.

"It is time to leave!" Aunt Petunia's loud voice broke Lexi from her thoughts, and the ten-year-old girl ran out from the cupboard to hurry into the car.

The car ride to Mr. Donaldson's office was going to be the worst part. In the past, at least Lexi had Harry to share the ride with, even though they weren't permitted to talk. Now Lexi's only companion was Aunt Petunia, which meant the trip was going to be less than spectacular.

"You will only answer direct questions," Aunt Petunia began to read Lexi the usual riot act once they were safely in the car and down the street. Every time they went to see Mr. Donaldson, Aunt Petunia felt the need to review the rules of behavior with her. The rules had never changed since she was a little girl; there was no reason for Lexi to act any differently than she had in the past. "If I hear one word about Hogwarts or magic, I will be locking you up in that cupboard of yours for a month!" Aunt Petunia warned.

Well that was new. Aunt Petunia had not uttered the words Hogwarts or magic since the night before Harry left. Obviously she was afraid that Lexi was going to say something about the subject that would be very difficult for her to explain.

That thought alone made Lexi's face break out into an evil grin. Harry and Padfoot had both individually explained to Lexi about the statue restricting knowledge of the magic world only to people who came from magic families. Aunt Petunia may or may not know about the restriction but she certainly didn't want Mr. Donaldson to think she was related to freaks who believed in magic. Perhaps this was the perfect time for Lexi to bring up the subject of her living arrangements once more.

"Aunt Petunia," Lexi began in a wondrous tone, "that is a lot of stuff for me to remember. It would be a lot easier if there was some incentive for me to conveniently forget where Harry is attending school." Lexi could see Aunt Petunia's mouth forming a tight line, at this low blow. Sirius had told her to strike the issue once more when she had the best advantage, she honestly didn't know if there would ever be a better chance to bring this up.

"And what kind of 'incentive' would you need?" Aunt Petunia said in little more than a whisper.

"Well, it would sure be nice for me and Harry to move out of that cramped cupboard," Lexi said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Even though Harry is away at school, he will be home during the holidays, and it would just be dreadful for us to continue to squeeze into our cupboard."

"What will happen if I don't agree?" Aunt Petunia asked, testing Lexi's resolve. Perhaps she did know all about the restrictions on the knowledge of the magical world.

"Well, I just wouldn't be able to make any guarantees regarding my memory," Lexi knew she was playing with fire, if she wasn't careful, she might get burned.

The rest of the car ride progressed in complete silence. Lexi hoped that Aunt Petunia was taking her 'request' seriously. If Aunt Petunia turned her down, there would be no chance that Harry and Lexi would ever be able to move out of that cupboard. They would be stuck there forever!

After they pulled into the parking lot, Aunt Petunia finally spoke again. "I guess now that Dudley is at school most of the time there is no need for him to have a second bedroom. After I clean it out, you can move your belongings up there."

Lexi was so excited that she was ready to do a cartwheel. Unfortunately, she was suddenly struck with a terrible thought. What if Aunt Petunia was merely saying this so she would behave during this visit and not actually follow through on the agreement?

"Aunt Petunia," Lexi said after she exited the car and joined her aunt in entering the social services building. "If you don't follow through on the agreement, not only will people from my world be very displeased, but I will guarantee to mention certain things on our next visit here."

Aunt Petunia turned a rather interesting shade of white, which made Lexi suspect she had no intention of following through on the agreement. At least now she had a better chance of improving her life on Privet Drive.

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"You agreed to what?" the voice of Vernon Dursley bellowed from the kitchen.

The visit with Mr. Donaldson went rather well all things considering. He had been well aware that Harry now attended a school called Hogwarts, in Scotland. But instead of it being a school that taught magic, he thought it was a school for the gifted. Which, Lexi conceded one could consider individuals that performed magic as gifted.

The look on Aunt Petunia's face was something Lexi was going to remember for a very long time. At the mere mention of Hogwarts

being for the gifted, Aunt Petunia looked like she bit into a very sour lemon and was stuck with it in her mouth for the rest of the visit. All things considered, that was the most fun Lexi had at one of those meetings in a long time.

“Those freaks are not going to take anything from Dudley!” Uncle Vernon’s voice could be heard bellowing once more.

If Aunt Petunia honestly thought the neighbors couldn’t hear Uncle Vernon’s shouting rants then she was a lot thicker than she appeared. How anyone within twenty-five kilometers could avoid hearing what was being wailed by her walrus of an uncle was beyond her.

“I don’t care if people from her world will interfere with our lives. We’ll just get rid of the runt like we should have in the first place.” Uncle Vernon continued to shout. “Let her freak of a brother figure out where she is once he gets back. I’ve never been convinced she was actually a part of the deal we made when we took him.” Uncle Vernon’s words made Lexi’s blood turn to ice. She was paralyzed by fear that he could still somehow keep her from Harry, like he always threatened when they were younger.

Lexi had been gathering her merger possessions to prepare them for a quick trip up the stairs to her new room. However things had taken a drastic turn for the worst. Lexi stopped what she was doing and merely sat in front of the cupboard door desperately trying to listen to what was being said in the other room. This was the first time in her life that she wished her aunt was a bit louder when she spoke.

“I know, Pet,” Vernon’s voice seemed much quieter. “I just wish we could drop the freaks off at a foster home or an orphanage. I know we were forced into that agreement by that Dumbblydork man.” Vernon spat as his volume increased. “The freaks will share a room, but that is it. Anymore trouble out of them and we’ll kick them out and Dumbblydork will have to take us to court!”

Lexi breathed a sigh of relief. She and Harry won this round only because of Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon’s fear of the wizarding world. It wasn’t much in the way of victories but it was one. Now they

had won a grand total of two things; the right to go to Hogwarts and the right to have a semi-comfortable living space.

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Harry awoke early on Saturday morning. It was the day of his first Quidditch match and he could hardly wait. He had been training for this day for weeks and now that it was here he was anxious for the game to begin.

After a quick shower Harry rushed down to common room to meet Hermione for breakfast. Hermione was always a bit of an early bird, so Harry did not have to wait for long for her to join him in heading for breakfast.

The days leading up to the match had been quite ridiculous since the incident with the Slytherin students. For some reason the entire house began keeping their distance from the Gryffindor team for the first time in recent memory. When one student was finally cornered and asked why by Wood, the student merely replied 'the Gryff team was under Potter and Granger's protection'. Even now Harry had to chuckle at the absurdity of that statement.

Lexi had sent him an encouraging letter the day before that Hedwig delivered during dinner. Several of the other students sitting around Harry were quite curious as to why he would be receiving a letter in the evening instead of in the morning, but Harry wouldn't share any information about his letter with them. Hermione was the only person he shared anything personal with due to their friendship. Everyone else saw him as the Boy-Who-Lived, only Hermione saw him as just Harry.

Lexi had told Harry in her letter that she had several surprises for him when he came home for the winter holidays. She told him that they were the good kind of surprises but Harry still had a knot in his stomach at the mere thought. For some reason Harry had a feeling that Lexi was keeping something important from him, but for the life of him he couldn't figure out what it could be about.

Harry pushed aside his thoughts about Lexi's surprises once they reached the Great Hall. After sitting down at the Gryffindor table Harry had to concentrate on forcing down some food. He was so excited he could barely force himself to eat. However, under the watchful eyes of Hermione, he would be rightfully chewed out for not at least downing a few pieces of toast.

Once he had eaten enough food for Hermione to be satisfied, Harry glanced down at his watch and sighed, it was only eight am. He still had a long time left before the match began at eleven.

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"... and this year's Gryffindor team is lead by captain and Keeper Oliver Wood; with Chasers Bell, Spinnet, and Johnson, Beaters Weasley, and Weasley and the youngest Seeker in a century Potter!" The voice of Gryffindor Lee Jordan rang across the pitch as the Gryffindor team flew into the stadium in formation at exactly eleven am.

Harry was in his element as he swooped around the Quidditch pitch in a quick warm-up lap to show off to the rest of the school watching the match. It was tradition for each team to fly around the pitch after they were announced before the school, but Harry saw it as a chance to let off a little pent up energy before the game actually started.

The team landed in perfect unison in their positions to start the match. Harry was standing directly across the pitch from the Slytherin Seeker, Terence Higgs. Higgs wasn't as big or brutish as the rest of the Slytherin team, but then again Wood had confided in Harry that Seekers were typically small and light to provide for easier maneuverability in the air.

"Now I want a nice clean match," Madam Hooch broke up the stare down occurring between the two teams. "Mount your brooms."

Both teams did as Madam Hooch asked and immediately at the sound of the whistle they all took off the ground.

“Johnson takes control of the Quaffle,” Lee Jordan’s voice rang through the stadium, but Harry tuned it out. There was only one thing he needed to concentrate on and that was catching the Snitch.

Harry knew there were technically two different plays for him in the air. If the Chasers had an easy time of the Slytherin team, and were able to rack up the score, Harry was supposed to let them go about it and try to delay his capture of the Snitch. Of course only if he was able to prevent the opposing Seeker from doing the same. However, if the Slytherins were slathering them, then Harry was supposed to catch the Snitch as fast as he could to end the game while they had a chance at winning.

As Harry made his usual sweeps of the pitch, Harry noticed something a bit odd. The Slytherin Seeker didn’t seem to be forming his own search patterns; instead he was following everything that Harry did. If Harry dived, Higgs dived. If Harry flew over the stands, Higgs did as well. No matter what he tried to do, the other Seeker was right on top of him.

With the other Seeker right on top of him, it was hard for Harry to concentrate on his search for the Snitch. If the other Seeker diverted his course just a bit, they would run the risk of a collision. According to a book on Quidditch rules and regulations Hermione made him read, a collision between Seekers while the Snitch was not in play would result in a Gryffindor penalty.

There was only one thing Harry could do. He had to get rid of this git fast. Quickly developing a plan of attack, he looked for an opportunity to put it into play. Down below, Harry saw that Marcus Flint was directly under their flight path with the Quaffle in his hand. Perhaps this was a chance to kill two birds with one stone.

Harry allowed his face to contort into a look of surprise, then glee before he dove downward. Hoping Higgs had been close enough to see the look on his face; Harry continued to dive into Flint’s path. If Higgs continued to follow him, then everyone would think Harry had seen the Snitch. Which was the important part of Harry’s plan, since cutting in front of a Chaser while the Quaffle was in play was considered a penalty unless the Snitch was in play. It seemed as

though the Snitch trumped just about everything else in Quidditch hierarchy.

Higgs did fall for Harry's trick and quickly followed Harry while trying to advance his speed. Unfortunately Higgs was slightly behind Harry and did not realize exactly where he was flying. While Harry was able to keep ahead of Flint's flight pattern, Higgs nearly crashed into his captain.

Harry would have preferred for his foe to crash into Flint, however, forcing Flint to fishtail into the path of one of the other Slytherin Chasers causing the Quaffle to drop while both Slytherins crashed to the ground was a good alternative. Higgs continued to shadow everything Harry did, thinking Harry saw the Snitch while he for some reason couldn't see it.

Harry kept a high speed as he continued to cruise around the pitch, weaving in and out of other people's flight patterns. Harry crossed paths with the occasional Gryffindor to keep appearances and prevent anyone from thinking he didn't see the Snitch. Nearing the Slytherin stands, Harry had a sudden burst of inspiration.

Harry slowed his speed by a fraction of a second, which allowed Higgs to gain some ground and end up with the tip of his broom at Harry's waist. Harry reached out his arm as he pretended to gain ground on the Snitch. Higgs on the other hand pushed his broom to the maximum level and gained more ground on Harry.

When Higgs finally got to head-level with Harry, they were practically on top of the stands. Harry gave Higgs a curtsy wink before diving down and Higgs, like a lapdog followed. The closer they were to the stands, the more Harry could see Higgs began to hesitate. Just as Harry was about to crash into the stands, when he veered to the left and headed towards the ground.

Higgs continued to follow Harry, and veered as well. It was almost as if Higgs was reading his mind, or perhaps he had no desire to eat the stands. Either way Higgs followed Harry rapidly heading to the ground. There was only one thing left that Harry could think of, but it was incredibly risky and he had never tried anything like it before.

Which meant Hermione was likely to chew him out after the match for doing so. But this was Quidditch, it was war, he had to try.

Harry continued on his collision course with the ground as Higgs tried to regain the distance he lost on Harry during the incident with the stands. Harry continued until he was only twenty feet from the ground, his hand extended towards the imaginary Snitch once again. Higgs again put in an extra burst of speed, attempting to reach head-level with Harry.

Harry pretended to clutch at something only to fail to have anything in his hand. This immediately drew Higgs complete attention to where the Snitch should be, and not on the ground. Higgs continued to stare at where Harry's hand was as if he was trying to figure out exactly where the Snitch was in front of Harry. Harry used that distraction to his advantage, to continually rush to the ground while Higgs remained unaware of his surroundings.

Five feet to the ground, Harry sharply pulled out of the dive, Higgs however was too slow. As Higgs watched Harry pull out the dive, he immediately tried to do the same, but the delayed response was all it took for Higgs to crash into the ground.

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"... and Slytherin Seeker Higgs eats the turf. It looks like Potter lost the Snitch at some point in his cross pitch journey and decided to perform the Wronski Defense Feint to show Higgs why its not a good idea to mark the other Seeker." Lee Jordan's voice rang across the Quidditch pitch.

"Jordan!" Professor McGonagall called out as a warning for the commentator to remain unbiased.

"Oh, Harry," Hermione fretted from her seat in the Gryffindor section. "I'm going to kill you for that, you haven't even practice that move before!"

"He hasn't?" Neville Longbottom, who was sitting next to her asked, the awe poorly hidden in his voice.

“Of course not!” Hermione snapped, more out of her worry for Harry than her annoyance at Neville. “My goodness, Neville, Harry only started flying the second week of September, there have been too many other things for him to master and worry about than advance Quidditch moves.”

“That rumor’s true?” Neville asked before continuing when Hermione nodded her head distractedly. She had not taken her eyes off Harry since he made it to the air. “I thought it was just something the Quidditch team made up to scare the other teams. Man, look at him fly!” Neville praised Harry after he made another sharp dive, apparently seeing the Snitch.

Hermione gripped the rail in front of her bleacher in a death grip. She sat in the front row to ensure that nothing would interfere with her view of Harry in the air. Flying and Quidditch was so dangerous, it was a wonder that the adults in the wizarding world felt it was an acceptable sport with its high mortality rate for players and spectators alike. While Hermione understood how much Harry enjoyed playing, it didn’t stop her from worrying about him.

Suddenly Harry’s broom started bucking in the air, as though it were about to throw him off. Hermione had seen tons of Quidditch practices to know immediately that there was something seriously wrong with her friend’s broom. She had never seen a broom do anything like that before.

“What’s he doing?” Neville asked with genuine concern for her friend.

“I have not the slightest clue,” Hermione replied as she mentally cursed herself for not bringing her binoculars to Hogwarts with her. Her mother told her she wouldn’t need them, and of course, there was nothing else she needed more at the moment. “Looks like someone hexed his broom,” Hermione said, periodically taking her eyes off Harry to scan the crowd, hoping to find someone acting suspicious.

“No student could have cursed a broom,” Neville replied. “The brooms have heavy enchantments on them, and since the Nimbus

2000 is the top of the line, you can bet it has the best money can buy.”

Hermione immediately narrowed her eyes on the teacher bleachers the moment Neville said that. Someone obviously had it out for Harry, and it was beginning to look like it was a teacher. Perhaps this teacher was also the source of Harry’s mysterious headache on Halloween night? Trying to scan the teacher section was useless from Hermione’s distance so she turned her attention back on Harry, as she pulled her wand out. He was going to fall, she’d catch him. She had to.

~*~

Harry was hanging on to his broom for dear life. It had never acted this way before and it was very upsetting for Harry. He had no idea to react to his broom’s behavior and what made it worse was there was no way for him to search for the Snitch will clinging to a bucking broom, praying not to fall. The Slytherin team had employed some really dirty tactics against his fellow players, and the only way to stop it was to catch the Snitch and end the game. However, with his broom acting up it was easier said than done.

The broom began to move more raggedly than merely small up and down bursts. Now his broom began to rise up a few feet before dropping Harry down several more. The broom began to go side to side. A bit to the right, then the broom would substantially drop down five to ten feet. Next the broom would move to the left before rising fifteen feet. There was no way for Harry to anticipate the broom’s next action. Worst of all his head began to hurt again like it had done on Halloween, which made it very difficult for him to concentrate on what he was doing.

As Harry began to zig-zag up and down the field, he caught sight of something gold. Of course the first time he actually spotted the Snitch would come at a time that there was no way for him to actually grab it. But Harry had to try to do something. Higgs’ time kissing the dirt didn’t gain Harry as much time as he hoped. From his position high in the air, Harry could see the Slytherin Seeker preparing to get back on his broom. He had to do something or Gryffindor was likely to lose.

Harry firmly held on to the shaft of the broom with both hands. Putting all of his strength into it, Harry attempted to guide the broom to where the Snitch was hovering over the players. With all of Harry's strength and concentration put into guiding the broom, even with his head feeling like it was about to split open, Harry stopped moving left to right and was actually moving towards where the Snitch was positioned. The only problem was he was still moving higher and lower in the air, but at least he was moving where he wanted to go.

As Harry moved across the pitch he never noticed the temperature dramatically drop. He never heard the screams of the spectators as hundreds of cloaked figures made their way from the gates of the school towards the Quidditch pitch where there were hundreds of people experiencing joyous feelings for them to feast on. Harry never noticed these things since he had tuned out everything that risked him from meeting his goal.

Closer and closer Harry got to the Snitch. His broom stopped bucking wildly as he nearly reached the Snitch. Suddenly it stopped forcing Harry to go anywhere, and the pain in his head had instantly stopped. He nearly overshot the Snitch in all the confusion of those few crucial seconds. But he did it, his quick reflexes made the appropriate adjustments to his course and he was able to secure the Snitch.

Just as Harry was about to pump his fist in victory for catching the Snitch against the odds, the world began to get dark. While his head no longer hurt like it did before, he began to hear a voice screaming as if they were really far away. Almost as if the person screaming was at the end of a very long tunnel. As Harry tried to focus his attention away from the scream and the darkness it was becoming more and more difficult, since it seemed like the person screaming was getting

Harry's eyes began to close, and he knew that was not good. If he closed his eyes, he ran the risk of crashing and killing himself. He had to remain alert; he had to keep his eyes open. However, as he did so, he saw the unthinkable. A cloaked figure flew in front of him, and pulled down its hood to reveal a skeletal like head, with wide open lips.

Harry felt like something was being sucked out of him, like all his happiness was going away. It was almost like he would never be happy again. As the thing got closer and closer to Harry the screaming became louder and Harry could hear words.

“Not Harry!” The woman pleaded. “Please don’t hurt my son. Kill me instead.”

Suddenly Harry could take no more, and despite his best efforts he slipped into the world of unconsciousness. Harry tumbled off his broom in the process.

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Hermione’s eyes never wavered from Harry as the Dementors stormed the pitch. All of the students and staff were in a panic due to their sudden appearance during a Quidditch match, but Hermione was not going to let it faze her. Harry was the one in more trouble than she. Hermione was one of many; Harry could be easily singled out by one of the beasts.

Neville had grabbed her arm and attempted to pull her along with him, as he fled the stadium, but she refused to go. Harry was up there, on a hexed broom, and he didn’t seem to realize the Dementors were on the pitch. She brushed off his attempts to lead her away, and instead of leaving himself. Neville stayed with Hermione, trying to keep a watchful eye on Harry in all of the chaos.

One of the Dementors did exactly as Hermione predicted it would. It targeted Harry and started to go straight for him. She didn’t know what to do, but she gripped her wand tightly. She could see the silvery creatures of the patroni of several staff members attacking the Dementors. However, none of them were targeting the one near Harry.

The Dementor shot closer to Harry, and he suddenly slipped off his broom. Hermione’s wand shot up without a thought and she cast the only spell she could think of in the situation.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" the bushy-haired witch roared out like second nature.

Hermione's spell instantly connected with her target and caught Harry dramatically slowing his fall. Hermione pushed as much power as she could into her spell as she continued to attempt to control Harry's fall. Every second he seemed to be falling slower, but it didn't seem to be enough. She wasn't magically strong enough to stop her friend's fall.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" a quiet voice next to Hermione called out.

She knew who it was; Neville Longbottom was trying to help her with the spell. Neville's spell also connected with Harry as the two students gained control of Harry's fall. Hermione could feel that sweat dripping down her face, even in the Dementor chilled air, as she continued to put everything she had into the spell. Slowly yet surely, Harry's rapid fall had transitioned into a gentle glide as the two first years did the impossible, and caught a falling person with a levitation charm.

Once Harry had safely reached the ground, although his landing was a bit rough, Hermione finally took her wand off her friend and collapsed back into the seat behind her. She was quickly followed by Neville who seemed to be trying to say something.

"What is it, Neville?" Hermione tiredly asked the boy next to her.

"That is impossible," the boy spluttered. "You can't catch someone with a levitating charm. Heck, you're not supposed to be able to use it to lift anything large or living."

Hermione looked at Neville with wide eyes. She had never read that before. Granted she didn't spend a lot of time on the levitation charm since the incident on Halloween, but she would have seen or heard something like this before.

"Well, that was how we got past the troll on Halloween," Hermione began to explain. "We levitated pieces of the destroyed bathroom stalls into the troll. They are large but light. I just used this spell since

it was the only thing I could think of,” the bushy-haired witch continued to justify her actions. “And I didn’t do it alone, you helped.”

“You really faced a troll on Halloween?” Neville asked with wonder in his tone. “I just thought that was a story.”

“No, its true,” Hermione replied. “Why did you think it was a story?” Hermione was genuinely interested in knowing what the boy thought that while the rest of the school believed any strange story about Harry and her.

“Well, neither of you ever said anything about it,” Neville replied in an embarrassed tone. “Sorry for not believing it.”

“Don’t worry,” Hermione replied. “If I were in your position I probably wouldn’t believe it myself.” The round-faced boy shot her a small smile, which Hermione heartily returned.

“Let’s go down to the pitch,” Hermione said. “We better check on Harry.”

As the two Gryffindors made their way to the Quidditch field, an important thought suddenly struck Hermione. Perhaps there was a way to kill all those silly rumors around Harry whenever something happened by having someone handle all of Harry’s public relations issues. Perhaps Harry Potter needed a publicist?

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A/N: Here's the next chapter! Couldn't leave this one with much of a cliffhanger like the troll/Remus part. As you can see Harry's backbone is starting to show itself as his zero tolerance policy with bullies begins to show itself and Hermione heartily shares his view. The school term is winding down and it is nearly time for the Christmas holidays which will have something everyone is looking forward to. ;) We've only have one more chapter to go.

I need to thank everyone that has reviewed. I greatly appreciate all the comments and critiques about my story. I've noticed that the reviews have been fewer during the last few chapters. Please leave

me something even if you are telling me you don't like the story, I'd like to know if that is the case so I can work to improve it. Also, before I forget a big thank you to Zephy for her awesome beta skills. Also, work will be busy for while still so only weekly updates till it slows down again. Feel free to check out my profile for the date of the next update.

Foria

Next Chapter: Legilim- What?

Chapter 11: Legilim- What?

Hermione and Neville raced from the stands to the Quidditch pitch. Unfortunately it took them longer than they wanted, due to the stampede of students rushing out of the stands to get to the safety of the castle. Even though members of the staff had successfully used the Patronus charm to chase away the Dementors, most of the students were fearful that there maybe a repeat attack.

When Hermione finally made it to the pitch, the place was in chaos. Professors McGonagall and Burbage were levitating Harry on a stretcher off of the pitch. It looked like they were taking him to the Hospital Wing of the castle, but before Hermione and Neville could follow, they were stopped by the brutish captain of the Slytherin team, Marcus Flint.

"Here they are, Madam Hooch," Flint yelled to the flying instructor who was speaking with Oliver Wood on the other side of the pitch. "These are the two people who interfered with the match. I'll keep them here."

Flint tried to grab the shoulder of Hermione's robe, but she batted away the larger boy's hand.

"I don't know what this is about," Hermione began, "but I need to go. Harry may have been seriously injured."

From beside her, Hermione realized that Neville seemed to be shaking. Reaching for his arm, Hermione grabbed a hold of the scared boy, in an attempt to calm his nerves.

"You won't be going anywhere, cheaters," Flint sneered. "Thanks to the two of you, Slytherin will be winning this match by default. I wonder how all your little Gryffindor friends will react to that?"

Neville was trembling under Hermione's grip. But Hermione wasn't about to show any fear to a bully like Flint.

"I don't care," Hermione said defiantly. "Harry's safety is more important than the results of this stupid game."

At that moment Madam Hooch and Oliver Wood approached the trio. Madam Hooch looked shaken up while Wood looked graver and more serious than he had ever appeared before.

"Madam Hooch," Flint began flashing a condescending look to Wood. "Here are the two who interfered with the match. I witnessed them casting a spell on the Gryffindor Seeker. I guess that means Slytherin wins the match."

"Actually, Mr. Flint, the Snitch was already caught by Mr. Potter before Miss Granger and Mr. Longbottom caught Mr. Potter." Madam Hooch replied. "The game was over before either of these first-years cast their spells."

Flint's face immediately dropped while Oliver Wood looked as though Madam Hooch announced Christmas would be celebrated twice a year. Hermione also noticed that Neville had stopped shaking and was now taking several calming breaths.

"So, that means Gryffindor won, right, Madam Hooch?" Wood asked rubbing the Gryffindor win in the face of Marcus Flint.

"That would be correct, Mr. Wood," Madam Hooch replied with a nod.

Hermione didn't waste anymore time. "May I please return to the castle now, Madam Hooch?" The young witch asked just before Flint began to rant.

"The Snitch was caught as he was falling!" Flint began to roar, sticking his finger in Madam Hooch's chest. "You're covering up for the Gryffindors! Everyone knows you favor their team and even go as far as to supervise their practices."

"Mr. Flint," the now furious Madam Hooch began. "How dare you accuse me of such misconduct!"

As Madam Hooch and Marcus Flint began to argue back and forth, Hermione quickly slipped away. If they really needed her for anything,

they would eventually find her. Anyways, it didn't look like they would be noticing her absence anytime soon.

As fast as she could, Hermione dashed up the path from the Quidditch pitch to the castle. It wasn't until the witch was halfway to her destination that she realized Neville had followed her and was struggling to keep up with the pace she had set to the castle. Not for the first time, Hermione wondered on whether or not it was a good thing that Hogwarts did not have any form of physical education as a part of their curriculum.

While Hermione was not very gifted in the area of physical exercise, it was very useful in keeping the body lean and strong. Neville was not very chubby, and his legs were much longer than her own. Yet, he was struggling to keep up with Hermione since he most likely was never exposed to any form of physical training as a pureblood wizard who never attended a muggle primary school. Perhaps she should speak with Professor McGonagall about having a program added to encourage exercise?

Hermione's thoughts came to an end as she entered the corridor that lead to the Hospital Wing, dropping her brisk pace to that of a fast walk. Neville seemed to let out a sigh of relief once they reached the doors of the Hospital Wing. Not wanting to waste another moment, Hermione pushed through the doors, only to run into Professors McGonagall and Burbage.

"Miss Granger," the stern head of house began, "what is the meaning of this?"

"How is Harry, Professor?" Hermione asked, ignoring Professor McGonagall's original question.

"He is going to be just fine, Miss Granger," Professor Burbage said with a smile on her face. "Actually it is due to you two that he is doing so well. If Mr. Potter actually fell from that height and hit the ground it is very likely he would no longer be with us."

“Professor Burbage!” Professor McGonagall’s cry of outrage could be heard throughout the Hospital Wing. “Why on earth would you tell the children that?”

“Honestly, Deputy Headmistress,” the younger professor quickly replied. “These children need to know the results of their actions. Without their courageous, quick thinking it is very likely that their friend would no longer be with us. They have the right to know they saved their friend’s life.”

“They are only children,” was Professor McGonagall’s stern reply.

“This is a school, Professor McGonagall,” Professor Burbage replied in a very respectful tone. “They are here to learn things on their journey to adulthood. Consider today a lesson they have learned. All actions have consequences. Sometimes they are bad, but other times, like today the results of an individual’s actions are good.”

Hermione was speechless. She did not know how to process what she was witnessing. Never in her wildest dreams did she ever suspect that she would see someone telling her stern transfiguration professor off. From the look on Neville’s face, it was very likely he was thinking something similar.

“Mr. Longbottom, Miss Granger,” Professor Burbage once again focused the students’ attention on herself. “I will walk you both back to your dormitory. Mr. Potter will be completely fine but he is still currently unconscious. He merely had a bad reaction to being so close to a Dementor. After a night in the Hospital Wing, he should be as good as new.”

Hermione merely nodded her head, and followed the muggle studies professor out of the room. While she would have preferred to have seen Harry, at least she knew how her friend was doing.

“Oh, and before I forget,” Professor Burbage said after stopping in the corridor in front of the Hospital Wing. “Thirty points to Gryffindor for each of you, for your practical use of a levitating charm.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione saw Neville's face light up. It suddenly dawned on the bushy-haired witch that this was probably the first time Neville ever gained points for Gryffindor.

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Harry skidded across the stone corridor of the Entrance Hall looking for Madam Hooch. He needed to speak with her as soon as possible. Upon waking in the Hospital Wing, Madam Pomfrey had informed him about what happened on the conclusion of the Quidditch match. Including the inquest the Slytherin team was invoking in regards to the result of the match.

Harry needed to find Madam Hooch immediately to tell her what had happened to him and what he thought should happen in terms of the result of the match.

As if thinking about her made her appear, Madam Hooch rounded the corner and entered the Entrance Hall.

"Mr. Potter!" Madam Hooch cried. "I was unaware that you had woken up. Let me be the first to congratulate you on your amazing catch of the Snitch."

"You saw that?" Harry asked momentarily distracted. Due to all the confusion that occurred at the end of the match, Harry did not think anyone actually saw him catch the Snitch.

"Of course I did, Mr. Potter," Madam Hooch replied. "I think nearly everyone was watching what happened to you on your broom. Anyone still watching you once the Dementors attacked could see that you clearly caught the Snitch, even though your broom was acting up. You did some mighty fine flying yesterday. I can't believe the nerve of the Slytherin team for calling an inquest when it was so obvious to anyone watching you as to what happened." Madam Hooch's anger at the Slytherin team was clear in her tone.

"Thank you, Madam Hooch," Harry replied, blushing at her compliment. "I actually wanted to talk to you about yesterday's match." Madam Hooch made a gesture indicating she was listening

and Harry continued, "I was wondering if we could do a redo on the entire match."

"By Merlin, Mr. Potter!" Madam Hooch cried. "What would possess you to want to negate Gryffindor's win to replay the match?"

"I just don't think it was very fair," Harry honestly replied. "I mean the whole Dementor attack thing, it just isn't right."

"Mr. Potter," Madam Hooch said while placing a hand on Harry's shoulder. "While it is very noble of you to want to replay the game, due to the unfortunate Dementor attack at the end, we just can't do it. Quidditch only ends once the Snitch is caught; you caught the Snitch. The game is over and the results are official. We can't change that."

"But—"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Potter," Madam Hooch continued, without giving Harry a chance to speak. "If I were even to entertain the idea of a rematch, because you requested it, I would be giving support to some of the Slytherin claims."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, genuinely confused as to what the flying instructor was referring to.

Madam Hooch seemed reluctant to answer Harry's question, which was a first for Harry in his relationship with her. Madam Hooch was always open with Harry, sharing information with him when she could, especially when telling Harry stories about his father.

"The headmaster will be announcing the results of the inquiry at breakfast this morning," Madam Hooch began. "Why don't you head to breakfast? Your question should be addressed by the headmaster during his speech."

Reluctantly Harry accepted Madam Hooch's request and entered the Great Hall, pondering what his flying instructor truly meant. He never noticed the twin pair of eyes who had witnessed his entire conversation with Madam Hooch.

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"Oh, Harry!" Hermione cried while flinging herself into his arms. Harry embraced the excited witch in front of him. "I'm so relieved that you are alright," Hermione continued to ramble. "I was so worried, even though Professor Burbage said you would be alright."

"I'm fine, Hermione," Harry replied, while sitting down next to the bushy-haired witch. "Thank you for what you did." Looking across the table, Harry saw Neville sitting across from him and Hermione. "You too, Neville," Harry amended. "Madam Pomfrey told me I owe my life to the two of you."

"Think nothing of it," Hermione replied a bit dismissively. "You're our friend, and we were merely doing what we could to help you."

"Yeah," Neville quietly agreed with a kind smile on his face.

Harry's face broke out into a smile as well; one that threatened to split the boy's face in half. Perhaps he had another friend at Hogwarts.

"May I have your attention please?" the ancient voice of Professor Dumbledore broke Harry from his thoughts. Immediately silence fell over the Great Hall. "As many of you know, the result of yesterday's Quidditch game between Gryffindor and Slytherin has been greatly contested due to events surrounding the Dementor attack at the end of the match. Using Pensieve evidence supplied by several staff members, I can safely call the game for Gryffindor."

Immediately a large amount of booing could be heard coming from the Slytherin table. Harry could understand their sentiment since he too had protested to Madam Hooch, that it wasn't a fair end to the game due to the Dementor attack.

"I know many of you may be disgruntled by the recent decision," the headmaster continued, bringing Harry out of his thoughts. "However, Mr. Potter caught the Snitch prior to the Dementor attack."

"Congratulations, Harry!" Hermione whispered from next to him. "Aren't you so excited?"

Harry smiled at Hermione's infectious attitude. "Yeah, it's great to have won my first Quidditch match," Harry quietly agreed.

"As for the other matter of the inquest," Professor Dumbledore said after a small pause, "I have found that there have been no improper acts between our flying instructor, Madam Hooch and the Gryffindor Quidditch team."

Harry's eyebrows immediately shot towards the sky. This was completely surprising.

"Madam Hooch has also volunteered to supervise any team's Quidditch practice that requests her presence." Professor Dumbledore said while his eyes scanned the hall. "However, she will only supervise the practice in the manner in which she does currently for the Gryffindor team. Thank you for your time, and please feel free to continue your breakfast."

Harry immediately loaded his plate to eat a large breakfast. Until the headmaster had said something, Harry wasn't even aware of how hungry he was. He hadn't eaten anything since breakfast the previous morning.

"Do you know what happened to your broom?" Hermione asked after giving Harry a few minutes to settle into his meal.

"Nope, no idea," Harry replied between mouthfuls of eggs. "But I did get a strange headache like the one on Halloween."

"Let's go to the library," Hermione nearly jumped out of her chair. "We still haven't figured out what caused that strange headache, and now it happened again."

"Can I at least finish my breakfast?" Harry asked the impatient witch.

"Of course," Hermione replied. "But make it fast."

After shoveling the rest of his breakfast in his mouth, Harry gave Neville a quick wave goodbye before following Hermione to the library.

He once again never noticed the twin eyes following his progression out of the room.

~*~

“Very good, Lexi,” Sirius said as he watched the young witch relax her face as her hair changed a few shades back to her usual black hair. This was the second time that Lexi had enough time to work with Sirius on her newly found skills. What Sirius would give to just wave his wand and do all of Lexi’s chores for her around the Dursley household so the poor child could have some time to herself.

The young girl had been using one particular look for so long, that it was difficult for her to easily change her appearance. Every Metamorphmagus had to work hard to develop their skills, but usually it was easy for them to change their hair or a particular feature of their face when under extreme emotional duress.

Lexi, for whatever reason, had to put a lot of concentration into changing any aspect of her appearance. Sirius personally believed it was due to the nature of her upbringing in the Dursley household, but he had no proof of it. Oh, what Sirius would give to be able to contact his cousin Andromeda and her daughter Nymphadora.

Sirius knew from before he was incarcerated that Nymphadora Tonks was a Metamorphmagus. She would be able to help Lexi, and give her better advice on how to change her appearance than Sirius could. The only thing Sirius knew about appearance changing was what he had learned in Transfiguration class. Unfortunately, he wasn’t sure if it was the exact same as what Lexi would need to learn to do.

Sirius knew he wasn’t the best teacher for the young witch, but he was the only teacher she had right now. At least until things changed for them, but who knew when that would be?

“Sirius,” Lexi started while staring at her reflection in the small broken mirror she used for practice. “How long do I have to practice this for?”

“Until it is natural for you to change your entire appearance in a matter of seconds,” Sirius said in his ‘teacher’ voice.

Lexi's eyes grew wide as she contemplated what her godfather had said. "That is going to take a very long time. I can barely change my hair a couple of shades now, what else do I need to learn?"

"By the time you master your skills, you will be able to change your entire body shape. You can change the size and color of your eyes," Sirius began to list. "Your hair color, length, and thickness could change as well as your nose and its size and shape. The general appearance of your face, the size of your chin, the position of your cheek bones could also be altered, not to mention all of the other areas of your body."

"What do you mean by the other areas of my body?" Lexi just had to ask.

"Well, you could change your height, your weight and any distinguishing marks on your body," Sirius replied, before being overcome with embarrassment. "As well as your chest size," he tried to sneak past the small witch.

"Chest size?" Lexi asked with wide eyes. "You mean the size of my boobs?"

"Yes," Sirius said after clearing his throat. "Eventually you could change your, well you know."

Lexi continued to stare at Sirius with wide eyes. She held that look for so long, Sirius was beginning to fear that her eyes were going to be stuck that way. Eventually she seemed to relax a little as her face took on a more natural expression.

"Padfoot, I don't think I ever want to mess around with my chest size," the small girl replied in a scandalized tone of voice. "Why in the world would any girl want huge boobs?"

Sirius desperately wanted to break down laughing, knowing in three to four years the girl in front of him would most likely have an entirely different opinion. However, the animagus kept his composure as he gave a serious reply to the young witch:

“Lexi, I’m going to hold you to that statement.”

This was going to be fun. There was nothing more thrilling for Sirius Black, then setting up a joke, even if it would take quite a bit of time for the said joke to come to fruition.

~*~

Harry and Hermione sat at their table in the library. They had been working on the mystery of the source of Harry’s odd headaches for nearly two weeks without any luck. Harry was a bit discouraged by their lack of progress, while Hermione was taking it as a challenge. His friend was determined to find the answer in one of her precious library books.

Since the Quidditch match, Neville had taken to occasionally hanging out with Harry and Hermione while they were in the library. While their new friend was painfully shy, he was an excellent addition to their study group. Even Hermione was impressed with his extensive knowledge of Herbology, a subject that neither Harry nor Hermione were exceptionally skilled at.

Harry sighed as he closed the latest book he was looking at. When they weren’t doing homework, he and Hermione were constantly researching the headache thing, and quite frankly, Harry was getting sick of doing so. Perhaps it was time for him to start researching something different.

Once he put away his book, Harry began looking for books on magical transportation. Term would be over in a couple of weeks, and Harry would need to figure out an easier way of returning to the Dursleys, than by muggle bus. Harry knew it wasn’t a good idea to ride his broom from Kings Cross Station to Privet Drive, so he would have to discover an alternative magical means of travel.

After walking up and down several rows of shelves, Harry finally found a book that may be promising, *The Secret Traveling Methods of Wizards*. Grabbing the book, Harry went back to his seat at their

table. Hopefully this would be more of an interesting read than his last book.

"What do you have there?" Hermione asked soon after Harry sat down.

"Just a book about magical travel," Harry said absently reading a section on flying carpets.

"Why are you interested in that?" Hermione asked in a snippy tone. While many people may have taken offense at her question and the way it was worded, Harry knew she meant no offense.

"I'm trying to find an easy way home from the Hogwarts' Express," Harry said finally looking up from his book. "I know the Dursleys will not be picking me up from the station, and I want to find something easier than the muggle bus."

Hermione bit her lip. Harry knew she was dying to say something about the Dursleys. Hermione did not like the way Harry's relatives treated Harry and Lexi, but it wasn't like anyone could do anything about it. Mr. Donaldson, their social worker, said the Dursleys were their only family. Harry and Lexi were stuck with them.

"Have you thought about using the Knight Bus?" Neville asked, breaking Harry's train of thoughts.

"Knight Bus?" Harry and Hermione asked in unison.

Neville gave a small chuckle. Whether it was due to the strange look of confusion on Hermione's face or the fact that Harry was slowly becoming more and more inquisitive like Hermione, Harry would never know.

"It's a special bus for wizards and witches to use." Neville began to explain. "The Knight Bus is typically used by stranded witches and wizards; however some people book rides on the Knight Bus in advance. They can take you anywhere, so long as it isn't underwater."

"How would someone find a stop to get on the Knight Bus?" Hermione asked completely interested in finding out more about this mode of transportation.

"A stop?" Neville asked completely bewildered.

"Hermione is referring to a bus stop." Harry replied, hoping to solve Neville's confusion. "It's a place where a muggle bus is scheduled to stop to pick up people interested in riding the bus."

"Oh, we don't have those," Neville replied. "All you have to do is stand on a curb and stick out your wand to flag down the Knight Bus. It comes rather quickly after you do that."

"So technically," Harry began attempting to puzzle out his way home to Lexi. "All I would have to do is stand on the curb at Kings Cross Station and stick out my wand, and this bus will pick me up and take me where I want to go?"

"Yep," Neville simply replied.

"Excellent," Harry said as he shut the book in front of him. "Guess I now know how I'm getting home, so I won't need to keep looking at this."

"What if you have a problem, Harry?" Hermione asked. "Shouldn't you have a backup plan?"

"I'll just use my broom," Harry nonchalantly replied. "It's not like I have any muggle money to use to get a bus ticket."

Hermione had a frown on her face, but she wisely chose not to comment on her friend's current plan. However, Harry knew she was disappointed in him for not researching magical transportation more thoroughly.

~*~

Hermione was calmly waiting for Harry in the common room to go to breakfast once again. Since the Quidditch match against Slytherin,

there had been several odd pranks played on her friend, typically over night. Hermione had wanted Harry to go forward to Professor McGonagall once they all started nearly three weeks ago, but he was adamant not to. It seemed that Harry felt if he went forward with the information, it would only make things worse for him.

Neville came lumbering down the boys' stairs and sat across from Hermione giving her a small smile. Since the Quidditch match, the shy boy had been a bit less reserved with her and Harry. However, he wasn't exactly a friend like Harry was.

"He's going to be a little bit," Neville quietly said in response to Hermione's unasked question.

"What was it this morning?" The bushy-haired witch sighed.

"His skin was green when he woke up," the shy boy replied. "Harry told me he was going to wash it off, but I doubt that it will work."

"Perhaps he'll tell Professor McGonagall now," Hermione muttered to herself, still disappointed in her friend's original decision.

"I doubt it," the round-faced boy replied in his low tone.

After another ten minutes, a very green Harry Potter snuck down the boys' staircase. His skin was green, and his hair was silver with streaks of green in it. Hermione had to cover her mouth with her hand, while Neville choked back a laugh. Harry Potter, the Gryffindor star Quidditch player sure looked completely odd dressed in all Slytherin colors.

"They even changed the crest on my school robes to that of the Slytherin house." Harry grumpily stated as he threw himself down on the couch next to Hermione. "I have no idea how to change it all back."

Hermione bit her lip before she uttered her reply. "Harry, are you sure a Gryffindor is doing this to you?" At Harry's questioning look Hermione continued, "What I mean is, why would anyone from

Gryffindor attempt to turn you, Harry Potter, into a Slytherin supporter?"

"Because they don't want me to be a part of their house," Harry replied, still in his foul mood. "I'm going to have to get a professor to fix this for me."

"I told you to tell Professor McGonagall," Hermione stated in a sing-song voice. "But you wouldn't listen and look how far it has gone."

"I'm not telling, Hermione," Harry said in a fierce tone. "To tell a professor would be to give in, to let these bullies know that they are getting to me. I'm just going to see a professor to help me get back to normal. I won't tell them how I got this way."

"Harry," Hermione replied in a warning tone, "I don't think a professor would just help you without finding out what happened. They would want to know what was going on."

"I'll find someone who will help me without asking any questions." Harry said with finality in his tone, before he got up and walked out the portrait hole.

Hermione just sighed as she and Neville rose to their feet and headed to breakfast. It may be Friday, their least busy day, but Hermione had a load of things to look up in the library after potions. Harry would hopefully snap out of his funk by the end of potions, and help her in researching the cause of his strange headaches, again.

~*~

Harry began to calm down as he marched through the halls of Hogwarts, hoping he was still early enough to avoid most of the other students. Harry knew Hermione was correct, and that any professor he went to would want to know who was causing this, especially his head of house, Professor McGonagall. However, Harry didn't want to divulge the information that he was being harassed to the stern professor simply because he was used to handling his problems on his own.

As Harry walked aimlessly along the corridor, lost in his thoughts, he nearly bumped into someone else: Professor Burbage.

"Harry, what happened to you?" Professor Burbage asked with obvious concern in her voice. Harry found this a bit odd since she had never used his first name before.

"Just a joke gone wrong," Harry said instinctively. "Could you possibly help me fix this?" Harry asked while gesturing towards his clothing.

"Of course, Harry," Professor Burbage quickly replied pulling him into a classroom.

Looking around the room Harry realized this must be the muggle studies classroom. There were several things around the room Harry hadn't seen since he arrived at Hogwarts. There was a shelving unit in the back corner of the room that immediately caught Harry's eye. On the shelves there was a small, old looking telly on the top-shelf. The middle shelf had several odd objects such as a rubber duck, an unplugged digital clock, and an old styled lamp.

Professor Burbage waved her wand over Harry several times as she muttered spells he wasn't able to catch. After a few minutes, the professor stopped and went to her desk to grab a small hand-held mirror.

"Well, here you go," Professor Burbage said after handing Harry the mirror so he could inspect his reflection. The face looking at Harry in the mirror was clearly his own.

"Thanks, Professor Burbage," Harry said quickly backing out of the room.

"Harry, those spells were pretty advanced color-change charms," Professor Burbage began before he could leave the room. "Spells that are far beyond the first-year curriculum, so I know you didn't cast these spells. Is there anything you wish to tell me?"

"No, Professor," Harry replied automatically.

"If you ever decide that you do want to talk about it, my door is always opened to you." Professor Burbage said.

"Thank you again, Professor," Harry said as the warning bell rang and he dashed out of the room. He had to run to potions or he was going to be late; Professor Burbage would understand that.

As Harry ran out of the classroom, he never noticed the concerned look on Professor Burbage's face.

~*~

Later that afternoon before dinner, Professor McGonagall called together all of the Gryffindors into the common room. This was a rare occurrence, but occasionally there would be important announcements Professor McGonagall had to share with the whole house.

"As you upperclassmen know," the stern professor began, "it is time for any students staying at Hogwarts this holiday season to sign-up to do so." Scanning around the room, Professor McGonagall continued, "is there anyone who currently knows they will be staying?"

The only people who raised their hands were the four Weasley brothers. Professor McGonagall had a look of dismay on her face as she continued to scan the room, looking to see if anyone else would be staying as well.

"Anyone else?" Professor McGonagall desperately asked. "Mr. Potter, perhaps?"

Harry looked at Professor McGonagall with a look of shock on his face. Why would she possibly think he would want to stay at school for the holidays?

"No, Professor," Harry respectfully replied, even though he was bewildered at Professor McGonagall's disappointed face.

Hermione sent Harry a questioning look, but all he could do was shrug in reply. He had no idea what that was about. Perhaps

Professor McGonagall didn't like the prospect of spending all of holiday with just the Weasleys as company.

~*~

On a snowy Saturday morning, Harry sat by the fire in the Gryffindor common room, reading the latest book Hermione had recommended for him to read for 'some light reading'. Hermione was once again in the library, searching answers to Harry's headache problem with Neville. Harry just had no desire to go to the library on this day. Many of the other students were playing in a large snow fight outside, which left the common room quite empty and noiseless.

Just as Harry was reaching an interesting point in his book, the portrait-hole flew open.

"Harry!" Hermione frantically called out, as she ran into the room. "I found it!" Harry immediately put a bookmark in his tome to mark his place as he jumped up to meet Hermione.

"Are you sure?" Harry asked.

"As sure as I can be," Hermione replied while biting her bottom lip.

"Well, what is it?" Harry asked a bit excited to be learning the cause of the mysterious headaches.

Hermione pulled a small thin book out from under her cloak, as Harry lead her to a small secluded table in the far corner of the room.

"Alright," Hermione began in her 'professor tone', "It looks like the pain you would feel is the direct cause of Legilimency: which is the process of someone trying to access your thoughts."

"Legilim- what?" Harry asked, a bit confused about what the bushy-haired witch had said.

"Legilimency," Hermione said a bit slower this time. "It is the process of reading a person's mind. If a person shields their thoughts, the

process of Legilimency may result in pain. Out of everything I've read, this makes the most sense as to the source of your headache."

"But, you are still unsure about something," Harry quickly replied. "I can tell."

"While it is the best fit to be source of your headache pain," Hermione began, "there are still a few inconstancies."

"Like?" Harry prompted.

"Well, a person usually needs to maintain eye contact with the person they are performing Legilimency on," Hermione explained. "During the Quidditch match, there was no way that could have happened. The only reason I still think this is Legilimency is due to the fact that someone cursed your broom. Perhaps the person who hexed you is the person who has been trying to read your thoughts, and there was some crossover." Hermione finally finished her rambling point. "It's a bit confusing but something we should investigate further."

"But this is what you think it is?" Harry asked Hermione once more.

"Yes," Hermione replied with confidence. "It's the only thing that makes sense."

"Then that's good enough for me," Harry responded, picking up the book Hermione checked out of the library for him. "So Legilimency is the process of reading a person's mind," Harry restated before receiving a confirming nod from Hermione. "That would mean that someone was trying to read my memories?"

"That's correct," Hermione replied.

"Why would someone want to read my mind?" Harry asked a bit bewildered at the concept. "It's not like I know anything important."

"Well," Hermione began a bit hesitantly, "I thought about that. When this first happened we were being questioned by the professors after our run in with the troll. Perhaps one of them was attempting to read your thoughts to figure out what had really happened."

Harry's face took on a disgusted look. "But we told them what happened. Why would anyone do that?"

"Maybe they didn't believe us," Hermione said with a shrug. "I'm not entirely sure. But if someone is using Legilimency on you, a good suspect would be one of the teachers who were there that night."

Harry raised his eyebrows at Hermione's last statement. As far as Harry knew, Hermione seemed to think that their professors could walk on water if they wanted to, which they might actually be able to do with magic, Harry conceded. The point was as far as Harry knew Hermione felt the professors could do no wrong. Now she was openly accusing one of them of reading his mind. Something was off.

"Why do you think it was a professor?" Harry asked, genuinely concerned.

"Who else could it be?" Hermione replied in a snippy tone. "There wasn't anyone else there after we encountered the troll, and Legilimency is very advanced magic. A student shouldn't be able to perform it. That would only leave a professor as the possible culprit."

"Do you have a theory on who it could be?" Harry asked since it appeared that Hermione had spent a lot of time thinking this all through.

"Well, out of all the professors there the night of the troll attack, there is only one person I have crossed off the list," Hermione replied. "I don't think it was Professor McGonagall since the headache stopped once we left with her. However it could be Professors Snape, Flitwick, Quirrell, or Dumbledore. I just don't know who."

"It probably wasn't Dumbledore," Harry responded. "According to Madam Pomfrey he wasn't at the Quidditch match. That just leaves us with Snape, Flitwick and Quirrell."

"How positively awful!" Hermione said with disgust. "To think, people can just read another person's mind when they see fit. It's just criminal!"

Harry couldn't prevent the smile threatening to escape his lips. Leave it to his best friend to be more upset with the fact that someone could read their minds, then with the idea that someone tried to harm him with a jinxed broom.

~*~

A/N: Alright next chapter is Harry's return home. Are you as excited as I am? Anyways, a huge thank you to everyone who has reviewed. You guys rock. Also, thank you zephy for being an awesome beta. See you all next week, same bat time, same bat channel.

Next Chapter: There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays

Chapter 12: There's No Place like Home for the Holidays

Albus Dumbledore sucked on a lemon drop as he rocked back in forth his big squishy chair behind his desk. Kicking his feet off the ground to place them on the edge of his desk, the headmaster leaned back to concentrate on the lemon confection candy in his mouth. Oh, how he loved his lemon drops; the hint of tart wrapped up in a sweet. Those muggles really did know how to make an interesting treat when they were motivated to do so.

Once the lemon drop was no more, Albus let his feet drop back to the ground. It was time, once again to get back to all the paperwork that was involved in being the headmaster of Hogwarts. If his predecessor, Armando Dippet, had told him exactly how much of his time would be spent doing paperwork, he may have taken longer to consider whether or not to accept the position of headmaster. Ah, what he would give to be the lowly transfiguration professor once again.

But that time was long gone. He now had the weight of the world on his shoulders, literally. Not only was he the headmaster of Hogwarts, but he was also the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards. Not to mention, he was the sole leader of the now dissolved Order of the Phoenix. Yes, he certainly had a lot of things stacked on his plate. But if he didn't do these things, who would?

It's not like there was an abundance of people willing to step up to the plate and lead the wizarding world in the name of the light and all that is good. No, there were definitely not enough people out there in the world. It was his job to ensure the light prevailed and that the darkness in the wizarding world was stomped out. Boy, did that take a toll on his mind and body.

Turning back to his paperwork, the elderly headmaster was forced to squint his eyes. Growing old certainly had its disadvantages. The sheets in front of him consisted all of the names of the students who were staying at Hogwarts over the Christmas holiday. As he looked at the Gryffindor list there was one absent name that greatly surprised him.

Harry Potter had not signed up to stay during the Christmas break.

Albus was sure once the boy returned to the wizarding world, it would be difficult to convince him to return to his relatives home in the muggle world at the end of each year. Now it was only the end of the first term and the boy was planning on heading back to the muggle world and his relatives. It was a bit surprising for the headmaster.

He hoped the boy wasn't overly fond on the muggle world. It wouldn't do to have the Boy-Who-Lived leave the magical world once he graduated from Hogwarts. He was a symbol of the wizarding world, a beacon for the light. In fact, if Albus was a betting man, he would wager the boy had the opportunity to be his successor one day if he played his cards right.

But that was far in the future. The boy had years before that was likely to happen, and Albus would have to watch him carefully. It could be simply that he was very fond of his relatives. The wards around his aunt's home of Privet Drive were the strongest blood wards Albus had ever seen. They could only grow that strong if there was a great love between members of the household. In fact they were so strong that Albus couldn't monitor anything in regards to the household.

When young Harry first went to live at his aunt's home, Albus had several charms and devices connected to the boy's magical signature to monitor his well-being. Within a month of him arriving at Privet Drive, all of his carefully placed plans were foiled. Everything stopped working.

At first Albus was afraid that Death Eaters had attacked the home before the wards had the opportunity to reach their full capacity. But fortunately, when he went to investigate the wards, he learned they were just so strong that nothing could breach them. The wards were so strong that Albus did not need his dear friend Arabella Figg to actively spy on the Dursleys for him. Granted that did not prevent the elderly woman from moving near Privet Drive, to be around just in case, but she did not need to force her way into the Dursleys life.

Since that day over ten years ago, Albus did not worry about young Harry Potter and his living situation with the Dursley family. Obviously all was well there, and that meant there was no need for concern. But perhaps things were all too well. Time would only tell on that aspect.

Popping another lemon drop in his mouth, Albus began to consider his options. He had Minerva call another meeting of her house to ask if any students were planning on staying at Hogwarts over Christmas holiday. Hopefully young Harry would change his mind and spend the holiday here at Hogwarts with his magical peers.

But if the boy insisted on returning home for the holiday Albus would have to find away to make it secure. With Sirius Black on the loose, it will be a very dangerous for Harry to make the trip home. Both Hogwarts and Privet Drive had sufficient protections around them to protect the boy from an attack by Sirius Black. Yet, the trip from Hogwarts to Privet Drive was severely lacking in protections, and he, Albus Dumbledore would need to find away to make it safe.

Granted sometimes the things used for protection caused more harm than good. There would be no way a pack of Dementors could be used to escort the boy home. Albus had warned the Ministry and the Board of Governors that placing Dementors around a school full of children was not a good idea. Yet they didn't listen to him and poor Harry nearly had his soul sucked out by one of those fiendish beasts during of all things a school Quidditch match. The school matches were supposed to be a thing of fun, however, this one nearly ended in a fatality.

A small bell rang next to his desk. It was a warning that someone had given the password to his stone guardian and would be making their way up to his office. Looking at the clock positioned in the right corner of his desk, Albus realized it must be Minerva returning from her meeting with her lions.

After silently counting to fifteen, Albus called out, "Enter, Minerva," and the door to his office swung opened to show a startled Minerva McGonagall.

“One of these days, Albus, I will figure out how you do that.” The stern witch replied with a disapproving look on her face.

Not many people knew it only took seventeen seconds to ride the staircase to the outer door of his office, nor did they know that he was notified as soon as the password was given to his gargoyle protector, and it had moved out of their way. Albus loved to surprise people by telling them to enter as soon as they were right outside his office door. He had each staff member and prefect timed perfectly for the most startling reaction. Since not everyone rode the staircase. Some, like his potions master, preferred to walk up the revolving stairs to make their trip a little faster.

Needless to say no one had discovered the mechanisms of his fun quite yet, and he doubted that anyone, student or staff would ever have the chance or motivation to ruin his entertainment.

“Lemon drop?” Albus offered holding out a jar full of his favorite candies to Minerva’s look of disdain.

“Do you always have to throw those things around your office?” the stern woman in front of him complained.

“But Minerva!” Albus said with a bit of a whine to his voice. “These are the most wonderful treats in all the world and I should know. I spent a bit of time in my youth traveling across Europe in search of the most wonderful sweet in either the muggle or the wizarding world.”

The look of shock and awe on Minerva’s face was one Albus was going to remember for a while. Perhaps he should take a picture to use for his Christmas cards this year?

“Anyway,” Minerva began once she gained control over her motor skills once more. “I asked my house for the second time if anyone was planning on staying during break, and for the second time only the Weasley brothers will be with us. I dare say many of them are probably wondering if I am trying to convince other students to do so, so I am not stuck with mainly the Weasley twins for company. Merlin

knows how many detentions I'll have to assign them once term is concluded."

"Ah, but Minerva," Albus said with a twinkle in his eye, "since school is out of session once term is over, one could argue that the rules are no longer in effect after most of the students leave for the Hogwarts' Express."

Minerva's face dropped and Albus believed he saw what may have been fear in her eyes. "If those twin terrors ever try to use that excuse on me, I will know where they got that idea from. You do not want me to hold you responsible for their actions."

Albus at least had the decency to blush. While it may have been hilarious to let that bit of information slip to the Weasley twins, he did not want to cross his transfiguration professor. Being on Minerva McGonagall's bad side was never a good place to be.

"Right," Albus began, changing the subject back to the original topic. "Harry Potter is going back to Privet Drive for the winter holidays." Albus placed his hands under his chin as he pondered his next move.

"What should we do, Albus?" Minerva said with concern in her voice. "We can't force the boy to stay at Hogwarts over the break."

"I know," Albus sighed in reply. "Is there anything else you need?"

"No," Minerva said, understanding her cue to leave the headmaster to his thoughts.

Once she departed from the office, Albus grabbed another lemon drop and reclined back in his chair with his feet once more on his desk. Perhaps it was time to feel out the old crowd. See how a few of them were doing, and inquire whether or not any of them were interested in helping him out a bit. It was a pity that the Weasleys were going out of the country for the holidays. Albus had wished that the youngest Weasley boy would become friends with Harry, however, it seemed as though fate did not want that to be.

While he would still speak with Harry about possibly staying at Hogwarts for the break, Albus knew it would probably be useless. He began to contemplate what Remus Lupin was currently doing. He was the perfect member of the old crowd to keep an eye out on the boy while he was traveling to and from Privet Drive. Remus knew all too well about Sirius Black and the possible harm that could come to Harry due to the traitor. The only thing was Albus was going to have to find Remus first.

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“Alright,” the stern voice of Lexi Potter carried through the smallest bedroom of Privet Drive. “We only have four days until Harry returns and we need to make sure everything is ready for his return.”

The small ten-year-old was looking more like a drill sergeant than a little girl. She paced back and forth in front of the dog animagus, who was sitting on her bed. Sirius had been snuck into the bedroom due to the absence of the owners of the home. She had asked Sirius to join her for a ‘planning session’ for the return of her brother. Had Sirius know what her little planning session would entail he may have considered skipping out. Lexi Potter was one scary witch when she wanted to do.

“We have approximately an hour before the Dursleys will be home,” Lexi continued in her no-nonsense tone of voice. “That means we only have an hour to devise a way to get the Dursleys out of the house on the day Harry comes home. Having your first meeting with Harry here in our bedroom on Privet Drive is the best way for us to inform him of your presence.”

“Why is that?” Sirius asked with a confused look on his face.

“Harry may take it as a threat if you approach him on the street or if I bring him to a place where you are waiting.” Lexi simply stated. “He knows what you look like, and he may cause a scene once he meets you. It would be best to do it away from prying eyes that may call the cops or the aurors.”

“Aurors,” Sirius automatically corrected the young witch.

“Yes, the aurors,” Lexi continued. “The best way I see it, we need to come up with a way to legitimately remove Petunia and Vernon from the household for as long as possible.” Upon seeing the smirk on Sirius’s face, Lexi added, “While keeping them alive; killing people solves nothing.”

Sirius allowed a frown to cross his face. While he was the one telling Lexi ‘violence is never the answer’ he did feel an exception could be made in the case of Vernon and Petunia Dursley.

“Alright,” Sirius said while rubbing his hands together. “So we need to come up with a way to get Vernon and Petunia out of the house, while still alive, to give us the appropriate time to speak with Harry about all this. This should be easy.” Now Sirius moved his hand so it was rubbing his chin while his elbows were perched up on his knees.

“You don’t have anything, do you?” Lexi asked with a slight grin on her face.

“Nope,” Sirius replied regretfully. “Do you?”

“Well, I do have this one idea,” Lexi began as Sirius leaned in to hear better.

Hopefully she had something he could work with. Because the only things Sirius could think of all involved the Dursleys getting a one-way ticket to meet their maker.

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Harry was once again rushing up the hallway with Hermione in tow. They were going to be late for Charms class again. Professor McGonagall had held him after class to ask Harry if he had changed his plans for the holidays. For some reason the stern professor did not want to be left with just the Weasleys and kept turning to Harry to see if he would stay.

After the first time she had singled him out, Hermione had proposed the idea that perhaps Professor McGonagall was turning to him to set

an example for other members of their house. Hermione had reminded him that he was the Boy-Who-Lived and that many of their fellow housemates would be likely to look up to him. If Professor McGonagall wanted more students to stay for break, it would make sense for her to try to use the celebrity of the school to do so.

All Harry knew for sure was that he sure hated this extra attention that was placed on him. He just couldn't wait to return home to Lexi where he would just be Harry once again.

"Ah, Mr. Potter," an ancient voice came floating down the hall. "May I have a word?"

Harry skidded to a stop when he heard the voice of his new headmaster. He cautiously turned around to face the old man. In Harry's primary school nothing good ever came out of a meeting with the headmaster. So Harry was extremely hesitant to meet with the man who was standing down the hallway.

From next to him, Harry felt Hermione's hand touch his left arm. He hadn't even noticed that his friend had stopped when he did. But like usual, Hermione was not more than an arm's reach away.

When Harry stayed silent, he always welcomed his best friend to take the lead in a situation. It seldom happened anymore. The more comfortable he was at Hogwarts, the more assertive he became. However, this was just causing Harry to remember a time he met with his primary school headmaster, and was once again blamed for something Dudley had done.

"Is there something Harry can help you with, sir?" the bushy-haired witch asked for her friend.

A dark look momentarily crossed the headmaster's face at Hermione's question, which surprised Harry more than anything else. If you blinked your eyes you would have missed it, but Harry didn't. Harry could see for some reason his headmaster was annoyed by his friend.

"Well, Miss Granger, I believe?" At Hermione's nod, the headmaster continued. "I was merely hoping to have a word with young Mr. Potter before the end of term. Why don't you run along and inform Professor Flitwick that Harry here, will be a few moments late."

Hermione turned to glance at Harry, as if asking him for permission to follow the headmaster's instructions. Harry gave Hermione a small nod of his head, and she took her reluctant leave. Now Harry was all alone with Albus Dumbledore.

"Harry, it seems as though you have had an interesting term." The headmaster began once Hermione was around the corner. "Are you sure you want to go home for the holidays?"

Harry just gapped at the man in front of him. What was up with his teachers wanting him to stay at Hogwarts over break? First there was Professor McGonagall and now the headmaster. Something was definitely wrong.

"Sir, why does everyone want me to stay at Hogwarts over the holidays?" Harry asked cutting to the chase. He didn't want to mince words. If there was a genuine reason Harry should stay during break he wanted to know right away.

The headmaster let out a small chuckle. "I'm sorry my dear boy. Has Professor McGonagall spoken to you about this as well?"

Harry nodded his head, not willing to supply an opening for the older man to take the conversation off target.

"Yes, well," the headmaster stalled to carefully chose his words. "You have done quite remarkable throughout term and your professors who will be staying at the castle over break would love to give you some additional instruction."

Harry looked the headmaster directly in the eyes, as if he was attempting to determine the truth in the man's words by his eyes. Immediately when they made eye contact Harry felt a slight pushing sensation in his head. Harry dropped his eyes to the floor as he

considered his options. The pushing was nothing like the headaches he had experienced earlier in term, yet he had an idea of what it was.

Did the headmaster just attempt to perform Legilimency on him? It felt like a slight probe like the book described and it happened when he was making eye contact with someone. If Harry hadn't read that book about Legilimency he would have completely ignored it. Perhaps he needed to learn Occlumency, the art of defending the mind from external attacks. It would go a long way if Harry was correct in his current assumption about the headmaster. But more importantly if the headmaster just performed Legilimency, then what was the cause of his headaches before?

Taking a deep breath and returning his thoughts to the present situation, Harry thought about what the elderly man before him just said. There was something wrong with what he was saying.

"I'm sorry, sir," Harry began, not meeting the headmaster's eyes. "Hermione Granger is the top student in my year. If there was anyone the staff should be working with during the break it should be her."

"But my dear boy," the headmaster began with a grandfatherly smile on his face. "It is you they want, not her."

"I'm sorry, sir," Harry began once again. "I will not be accepting their proposal. I cannot in good faith accept any special treatment. I'm just Harry, not this Boy-Who-Lived that everyone expects me to be. I'm not the best at course work, that would be Hermione Granger, and any special staff projects rightfully belong to her."

There was a definite frown on the headmaster's face. "I understand Harry. Is there anything I can say that would cause you to stay here during the winter holidays? Perhaps I could teach you an advance spell or two to impress your classmates with?"

Harry liked the direction this conversation was turning less and less. There had to be something more that was causing the staff to react like this. Then it hit him, of course, how could he have been so blind?

"It's Black, isn't it?" Harry asked already knowing the answer by the look on the headmaster's face when he uttered those words. "He's the reason you all want me to stay at the castle. Would it be too dangerous for me to be at Privet Drive?" Harry asked his thoughts immediately turning to Lexi.

"No, not at all, Harry," the headmaster quickly replied. "It's the trip home that I'm a bit concerned about. Black is very crafty, and he must know by now the most powerful blood wards created by magic are protecting your house. Therefore, if he has any shot at getting to you it would have to be while you were in route to Privet Drive.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. Lexi was safe, these 'blood wards' that Dumbledore was talking about must be protecting her.

"Sir," Harry began after taking a few moments to think over his words. "I will be returning home for Christmas. Nothing will stop me from doing so. I will be careful and diligent in looking for anything that may be Black. But like I said, I will be home with my family for the holidays."

The headmaster dropped his head in defeat. "If that is what you wish, then there is nothing I can do to stop you from going home Harry," the headmaster replied. "Thank you for listening to an old man's concerns."

Harry took those words as a dismissal as he made his way to his Charms class. The headmaster had a lot of nerve to try to trick Harry into staying using bribes and guilt there at the end. Harry sure had a lot to share with Hermione once they could speak freely. Also, they had to get to the library as soon as possible. He had to know what blood wards were before he returned home for the holidays.

~*~

It was only an hour before the last carriage was leaving the castle for Hogsmead, but Neville didn't care. He was on a self-imposed mission. Not that it would have mattered if he missed the express. His Gran would just assume he did something foolish that prevented him from making the carriages. Perhaps he forgot what time they were leaving

at, or maybe he wasn't ready. It really didn't matter. His Gran could never see the truth when it as related to him. She merely assumed the worst and wrote him off as a failure.

Ahead of him in the corridor, Neville saw a flash of red, and knew his hunt was on. He had found at least one of the un-findable Weasley twins. Continuing along the way he saw the twin run, Neville reminded himself he needed to stop eating sweets. If he dropped a few pounds it would make running through the corridors a lot easier and it seemed to be something he frequently ended up doing.

As Neville turned around the corner, someone grabbed him from behind and threw him into a dark, cramped broom closet.

"Why are you following us," one of the twins began.

"I need to talk to you," Neville tried to choke out, but he was having difficulty since the wind had been knocked out of him when he entered the small room.

"Did McGonagall put you up to following us?" the other twin quickly questioned. "We know the old bat seems to think we are up to something."

"That's because you are," Neville was finally able to say. Reaching around Neville finally gained his bearings and was able to rise to his feet.

"What did you already tell her?" one of the twins questioned again.

"Nothing," Neville truthfully answered. "She didn't send me; I came here on my own."

"Really," one of the twins snorted. "Why?"

"To tell you to stop or I will go to her." Neville replied in all seriousness.

"Stop what?" one of the twins replied, trying to play dumb.

"Pranking Harry," Neville simply replied. "Once the pranks began, your brother Ron went around telling anyone who would listen it had to be done by the two of you. For what reason, I don't know nor do I care. What I do care about are the pictures I took the last time you two set up a prank on Harry. I wonder what Professor McGonagall would about them?"

One of the twins began to swear before saying, "I told you I thought someone was awake."

However, the other twin was the one that took Neville by surprise, "Lookie here, a firstie who blackmails."

"Listen," Neville continued. "I don't want to go to McGonagall and you don't want me to go to McGonagall, so just leave Harry alone and those pictures will disappear."

"Give us the pictures and we'll stop." one of the twins countered.

Neville just had to laugh. Did they really think he was born yesterday? He was a pure-blood after all. "Nice try. I'll be holding on to these pictures until you all stop."

"Then what happens to them?" one of the twins asked.

"They will disappear," Neville truthfully replied.

"Fine," both twins replied in unison as they opened to the door to the broom closet and Neville had to squint at the bright light.

"Why are you doing this?" one of the twins asked.

"Because," Neville began, "for some reason you two aren't treating Harry fairly. I don't know why, but I know he doesn't deserve it. If its because Harry is the Boy-Who-Lived, you shouldn't because Harry doesn't like the fame and crap. And if it was for something else, enough's enough. Harry shouldn't be continuously treated this way. And Gryffindors are better than the way the two of you are behaving."

With that Neville Longbottom walked away with his head held high, without sparing the Weasley twins a second look. If he had, he would have found shocked faces staring at him in awe.

~*~

For Harry Potter the last two days of term had flown by in a series of last-minute assignments and time researching in the library studying the use of blood wards. From everything Harry read there had to be extremely strong wards around the Dursleys home due to the connection that Harry and Lexi shared through their mother's sacrifice. It was sad to think of his mother's death as a good thing, at least she would always protect her children through the blood they shared.

While sitting with Hermione in a compartment on the Hogwarts Express, Harry began to mentally organizing the things he needed to share with Lexi as soon as he was able to get into their cupboard. Harry had only brought home a small backpack with only a few changes of clothing and his homework assignments. There was no way that his trunk would be able to fit in their living space which was another thing he would eventually have to think about. What would he do with his trunk when he had to take it home during the summer holidays?

There were just a lot of thoughts randomly flowing through his mind that afternoon. Harry was so distracted he never noticed his concerned friend spending more time looking at him, then concentrating on the book in front of her. Eventually, the bushy-haired witch had enough and broke the silence in the compartment.

"You're not going to forget me are you?" the witch asked with tears in her eyes.

Harry's head snapped up to concentrate on his friend. "What do you mean?" Harry bewilderedly asked.

"Once you go home you'll be with Lexi again," Hermione said while not meeting his eyes. "Are you going to forget about me since you'll have your sister back?"

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing. Why in the world was Hermione thinking this? She was his best friend; of course he wasn't going to forget her!

"I'd be mental to forget about you, Hermione," Harry replied trying to chase away his bushy-haired friend's insecurities.

"Do you think we can get together during the break?" Hermione eagerly asked. "I'd love to meet Lexi and I know that my parents would want to meet you as well."

Harry considered what Hermione was asking. On the one hand, the Dursleys would never permit him to have friends, let alone visit them. That would only make Harry happy. On the other hand, they didn't know Harry wasn't allowed to do magic out of school. That instantly made up Harry's mind.

"Of course, Hermione," Harry replied. "Why don't you give me your number and we'll set something up to meet after Boxing Day."

A large grin spread across Hermione's face as she ripped off a piece of parchment from a roll seated next to her to write her number on. Perhaps this holiday was going to be a lot more fun than Harry initially thought it would be.

~*~

"I'm going to miss you so much," Hermione said into Harry's chest as she gave him one last hug on the platform. Harry knew she had tears in her eyes, and hated to be the cause of her crying.

"I'll call you soon," Harry said while giving her one last squeeze before pulling away.

"Good bye, Hermione, Mr. and Mrs. Granger," Harry said as he started to walk away from the family, with just his backpack slung over one shoulder.

"Where's his family?" Harry could barely hear Mrs. Granger ask Hermione. He never heard her reply due to the distance between them.

After Harry walked out of the train station, he continued to walk a short distance away from all the madness. Once he was sufficiently down the road, and away from as many muggles as possible, Harry held out his wand arm and summoned the Knight Bus.

With a flash of violent purple, a Triple-Decker bus appeared out of nowhere. A door shot open and a boy in his late teens stepped out.

"Welcome to the Knight Bus, transportation for the stranded witch or wizard-" the boy began only to be cut off by Harry.

"Yes, I need to go to Surrey, specifically Magnolia Crescent." Harry said quickly, hoping no muggles would spot the bus in front of him.

"That will be fifteen sickles," the man said and Harry handed him a galleon, telling the man to keep the change.

"I need to go to Surrey as well," a man Harry didn't notice behind him said, as Harry got on the bus.

Harry turned to quickly glance at the man. He seemed to be in his late thirties, early forties and he had sandy blonde hair that was freckled with grey patches. Harry didn't hear where the other man wanted to go, but the way he was looking at Harry gave him the creeps.

Luckily for Harry, the conductor of the bus, Stan had seated the two of them a distance away from one another on the first floor of the bus. The man was seated on a bench two rows ahead of Harry, while Harry got a plush chair near the back. However, throughout the trip, the strange man kept turning around to shoot glances at Harry. Who was he?

~*~

Everything was perfect as far as Lexi was concerned. The Dursleys were tricked into going out to dinner with the neighbors from number six. Lexi didn't know how Sirius 'convinced' the neighbors to do so, but she was certain it involved magic. They would be gone till late, not knowing that Harry would be arriving at any moment. This gave them a good three to four hours with Sirius in the house before they came home. The only thing still missing was Harry.

As if her thoughts had summoned him, the door bell rang, and there was only one person Lexi was expecting.

"Harry!" Lexi cried as she flung herself at her bother after she opened the door. The two never showed affection in public, but Lexi didn't care. The Dursleys were gone and she finally had her brother with her once again.

"Hey, Lexi," Harry said into her hair, and Lexi widened her grin into his chest. She really had missed him. Before she knew it, tears were beginning to spill from her eyes. She never tried to cry but she was really glad he was home.

"Please, don't cry," Harry whispered to her, as she pulled away to wipe away her tears.

"I'll try not to," Lexi replied with a grin on her face. Her brother was home!

"Where are?" Harry gestured around to indicate the Dursleys.

"Gone for the evening," Lexi said with a wicked grin on her face. "I wanted your home coming to be special."

"Oh really?" Harry asked with raised eyebrows.

"Un-huh," Lexi said as she led him into the house and up the stairs.

"Where are we going?" Harry asked a bit bewildered.

"To your first surprise," Lexi said with a coy smile, finally stopping in front of what Harry knew as Dudley's second bedroom.

"What's in there?" Harry asked.

"Our room," Lexi said as she opened the door.

The room was drastically different from how Harry would have remembered it, Lexi contemplated as her brother looked around the room. Gone were all the broken toys and junk Dudley tended to collect. Instead there was just the small bed, the wardrobe, a bookshelf with Dudley's unused books, and a simple desk.

"How?" was all Harry could choke out.

"It was quite easy with the help of your second surprise." Lexi said, her evil grin shining through on her face.

"What second surprise?" Harry asked looking around the room.

"Come on out, Padfoot," Lexi said as a black dog came out from under the bed and transformed into Sirius Black.

"Him!" Harry yelled out in shock.

Before Lexi could do anything, Harry shouted something and his wand was in his hand, pointed at her godfather. A red-colored light shot out of wand and headed straight towards Padfoot.

~*~

A/N: So Sirius and Harry have had their first official contact. Seriously, this was the best place to cut it off. You don't want me to cut it off anywhere else in the next chapter. I nearly called the next one "All Hell Breaks Loose". Please review and let me know what you all think of this story.

I need to thank zephy for being an awesome beta and swanpride for joining the team. An FYI for all readers, the posting schedule for the next chapter is located in my profile.

Check out my new story The Den of Snakes. I just posted the first two chapters yesterday. It's one of my little side projects that I've been working on. Strength of Family is my primary project but Den of Snakes is a nice little side project that I like to work on occasionally to mix things up. It's drastically AU, much more than this story. I came up with the idea for it after reading Deathly Hallows and the way the ministry began persecuting muggle-borns. So enough spoilers and go read that story. You'll find it under my profile.

Check out my new yahoo group:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/forias_corner/

Foria

Next Chapter: Surprise! Look Whose Here!

Chapter 13: Surprise! Look whose here!

“Expelliarmus!” Harry roared at the sight of the man who had caused his family so much pain. But Harry wasn’t sure if it would cause any injury to Black since he had no wand. The disarming hex was the only offensive spell Harry knew.

“Harry, no!” Lexi cried as the spell connected with Sirius throwing him into the wall. Lexi ran forwards and tried to wrestle the wand out of his hand.

“Stop, Lexi,” Harry yelled as he tried to fight off his extremely aggressive sister. “You don’t understand. That man is Sirius Black. He is the reason our parents are dead. He is the reason we were stuck with them!” Harry spat out the last word, as Lexi finally ripped the wand away from Harry’s hand, and moved in front of Black to protect him.

“Sit,” Lexi said in a no nonsense tone of voice, while pointing the wand straight at Harry’s chest.

“You don’t know how to use that,” Harry countered while taking a step towards Lexi and Black. Lexi’s anger became visible as the wand in her hands began to spark. Harry reluctantly took a step back and sat on the lone bed in the room.

“You don’t know anything about Sirius Black,” Lexi countered. “And I know enough about magic to know that you can’t do any without your wand. All I need to do is keep it from you.”

Lexi never took her eyes off Harry as she backed towards where Sirius laid slumped against the wall. She shook his shoulder as she called his name but the man did little more than grunt in response.

“If you seriously hurt him, I’ll make you regret it,” Lexi hissed at her brother. “Come over here and help me move him to our bed.”

Harry reluctantly rose from his seat and helped Lexi move the man on to the bed. Even though Black was an adult it was not a difficult task

to lift the extremely thin man. As Harry looked at the traitorous man, he realized the man was barely more than skin and bones.

"How long has he been here?" Harry finally asked once Lexi was done making Black as comfortable as he could be.

"He showed up about two weeks after you left for term," Lexi replied not meeting his eyes.

"His been here for nearly three and a half months and you didn't see fit to tell me?" Harry asked truly enraged at his sister's behavior. They told each other everything. Why didn't she tell him?

"Why should I?" Lexi asked once again meeting his eyes. "I knew you wouldn't believe me in a letter about Black. Your mind was made up about him without giving him a chance to share his story just like everyone else," Lexi said with blazing eyes. If Harry didn't know better he would have sworn her hair was turning red. But that wasn't possible.

"What do you mean by 'just like everyone else'?" Harry asked genuinely confused.

"Oh, I guess you missed that part," Lexi said with narrowing eyes. "Sirius Black never received a trial. He was not our parents' Secret Keeper. Padfoot was used as a decoy to draw Voldemort to him, instead of the real one. What no one realized at the time was the real Secret Keeper was an agent of Voldemort. Sirius went to capture Peter, the traitor, but Peter escaped while faking his death."

Lexi sighed before she continued. "This resulted in Sirius being captured and sent to Azkaban for killing Peter, our parents' Secret Keeper and several muggles. Sirius Black is our godfather, he was the one we were supposed to live with if anything happened to Mum and Dad, but we couldn't since he was in Azkaban."

Harry just stared at Lexi with wide eyes. That was the most ridiculous story he had ever heard. There was no reason to believe his story but it looked like Black had brainwashed Lexi. Also, what caused Lexi to attack him like that? She would never raise a hand to him, but

something Black did caused her to attack him and take away his wand. What dark magic had Black cast on her to act this way?

Looking around the room, Harry quickly realized that Black must have also used dark magic on the Dursleys. There was no way they would take away something from Dudley and give it to them. The only thing was Harry was too inexperienced with magic to be able to do anything about it. It wasn't like Defense Against the Dark Arts had taught them a way to counter dark magic or really anything so far this year.

Harry turned to Lexi and dwelled on the changes in his sister. He needed to get his wand back from her and make a break for it before he too was exposed to Black's dark magic. If he got two blocks away, he could summon the Knight Bus and have them take him to the Ministry of Magic. They were the ones looking for Black, so they would want to know where he was.

"Let's move downstairs so Sirius can rest," Lexi quietly said before they slipped out of the room. Harry could tell that she was distraught at Black's condition, which only strengthened Harry's resolve to get her help.

Once they were sitting in the couch in the den, Harry sat as close to Lexi as he could.

"So, Black is innocent?" Harry asked while eyeing his wand.

"Yes, Harry," Lexi said calmly. "Sirius is the most wonderful person in the world. He does so much for me even though he has to live in the Dursleys' shed to be near me."

"Really?" Harry asked, glad to be getting some information on Black's actions and hideouts.

"Yeah, and he took me to see Mum and Dad's graves," Lexi said with wide eyes. "On Halloween, we visited them so that I could talk to them. Maybe he will take us there again since you are home. You better apologize to Sirius as soon as he wakes up. Families don't hurt each other, Harry."

"He's not our family!" Harry replied indignantly.

"Then who is?" Lexi asked patiently.

"Well, you and I are a family," Harry replied, "And I guess Hermione could almost be considered family as well."

"How can Hermione be considered family when I don't even know her?" Lexi asked Harry with a small smile on her face.

"Well she is a good friend who looks out for me," Harry replied. "I mean she saved my life at my Quidditch match."

"What do you mean she saved your life?" Lexi asked her shock evident in her face.

"Umm, there was an incident with a hexed broom and Dementors, but I'm alright," Harry added quickly.

"How can you almost die while playing a game?" Lexi asked genuinely worried. Before Harry could reply Lexi continued, "I thought it was safe to play this game."

"It is," Harry quickly replied. "It was just a strange series of events. Nothing like that had ever happened at Hogwarts before and it will most likely never happen again."

"This conversation is not done, Harry," Lexi said with anger reflected in her eyes. "But back to our original subject," she continued, "Sirius is a good friend to me who looks out for me," Lexi countered with a large smile on her face. "So if you think Hermione can be considered family, then so can Sirius."

Harry wasn't really playing attention to Lexi's words anymore as he watched her grip around the wand begin to slacken. Seeing his chance, Harry grabbed the wand and dashed for the door.

~*~

Lexi was beyond pissed as she ran out of number four Privet Drive. It was official, next time she wanted to surprise Harry she would have to make sure he was wandless first. Lexi never imagined that Harry would attack Sirius. Now he was upstairs unconscious and she was at fault for Harry taking off into the night. She should have known better than to drop her guard around her brother, but she really thought he understood what she told him.

Sirius was the only person who was there for her once Harry left for Hogwarts. Harry made new friends at Hogwarts and she made a friend on Privet Drive. Why couldn't Harry just accept that? Why did he want to hurt her Sirius?

"Harry, please stop," Lexi called out as she ran closer to Harry. Somehow since Harry went to Hogwarts, she had become faster than her older brother. However, her cry fell on deaf ears as he began to increase his pace.

They were now a block from number four Privet Drive. Lexi had no idea where Harry was going or what he was planning on doing but she had to stop him from doing something stupid. Pushing her legs as hard as she could, Lexi continued to gain ground on his brother. Before she knew it Harry was only a few feet ahead of her.

Seeing no other option Lexi tackled her brother, knocking the two of them down into the crunchy, cold snow covered lawn near the curb of the road. Once they hit the ground the two began to wrestle for the wand in Harry's hand. Lexi was beyond caring about what the neighbors would think or what they would tell the Dursleys if they were seen.

Lexi had never fought with Harry over anything before, but she would be damned if he was going to act irrationally and hurt their godfather. Sirius was the one person who would possibly be able to make things better for the two of them.

"Expelliarmus," a male's voice yelled out causing Harry and Lexi to stop what they were doing.

With reflexes that had been honed due to their treatment at the Dursleys, the two siblings both jumped up into standing positions next to each other. Their previous argument was completely forgotten.

“Who are you?” Harry bravely asked considering they were now wandless. The wand Harry had been holding on to was currently sitting in the older man’s hand.

Looking the man over carefully, Lexi realized he was the man from the graveyard in Godric’s Hollow. This man was Remus Lupin, another friend of her parents. Why was he trying to hurt them, if he was supposed to be a friend?

“I’m a friend of your parents,” Remus replied in a gentle manner.

“Really?” Harry asked in a distrusting voice. “It seems that a lot of those are popping up lately.”

“He’s telling the truth,” Lexi finally interjected. “He is Remus Lupin and he went to school with Mum and Dad.”

Both Harry and Remus turned to stare at Lexi due to her comment. Neither male could understand how she knew that, or who she was in Remus’ case.

“Who are you?” the graying man asked.

“Alexa Lily Potter,” Lexi said with her head held high. “I’m Harry’s little sister.”

Remus’ face showed his utter surprise. Sirius had told her that the Wizarding world most likely did not know about her. Her parents and Sirius had covered their tracks from Voldemort very well. However hearing about the possibility compared to seeing the results was a bit disturbing. It wasn’t fair that no one knew she was Harry’s sister!

“How do you know him?” Harry asked in puzzlement.

“He was at the cemetery,” Lexi began only to be cut off by Remus.

"You where there as well?" the older man asked. "I don't recall seeing you there."

"That's because I was hiding." Lexi snippily replied. Why did this man care whether or not he saw her?

"Why were you hiding?" Remus asked another annoying question. What was this, twenty questions?

"From you," Lexi replied bluntly. "You were threatening my godfather, there was no way I was going to let you hurt him." Lexi then stared at Remus straight in the eyes as if willing the older man to understand what she was willing to do to keep her family safe.

Remus hesitated before continuing the conversation, perhaps he had underestimated the danger he had been in that night in the cemetery. Even though he was a werewolf, he did not notice her. Lexi quietly pondered that fact while waiting for the man to speak. Everyone in the wizarding world knew that werewolves had advanced senses; at least that was what Sirius had told her. How did he miss her presence?

"We're not in a safe place to talk," Remus finally said again. "Would you mind if we moved somewhere else?"

"Where?" Harry asked and Lexi was sure he was just as reluctant to go anywhere with Remus as she was.

"How about your Aunt and Uncle's home?" Remus suggested.

"Why?" Lexi asked still unsure as the Remus' motives.

"Well, your aunt's home is the safest place for you," Remus began.

"Hold it," Harry interrupted. "What do you mean that Privet Drive is the safest place for us?"

Remus seemed to be weighing his words carefully before he replied. "When you were first placed with your aunt, Professor Dumbledore placed strong blood wards around the home. They protect you from

anyone meaning you harm. By going to your aunt's home, you will be safe from anyone meaning you harm and it would prevent muggles from hearing us discuss magic."

Lexi accepted that reasoning. The only thing she questioned was why the headmaster of her brother's school was putting wards around their aunt's home. It was highly unlikely that Aunt Petunia asked the headmaster to do so.

"Let's go there then," Harry said while grabbing hold of Lexi's hand. "But only if you give me my wand back."

"Only if you promise to not fight over it anymore," Remus replied in a chiding tone of voice, as he handed the wand back to Harry.

Lexi could instantly tell that Harry shared her opinion of not being amused at Remus' attempt at humor. However, once Harry had the wand in his hand, the odd party of three made their way back to number four Privet Drive.

"Lexi," Harry whispered so that Remus would not hear him. "If he makes a threatening move, we'll run for it. Okay?"

Lexi squeezed Harry's hand in response. While Remus said there were wards around Privet Drive protecting them from dangerous people, the only question left was whether or not they should trust Remus. For all they knew he was lying to them.

It wasn't like those supposed wards had ever protected them from the Dursleys.

~*~

Walking into Privet Drive, Harry felt uncomfortable having Remus behind him as they entered the house through the door. While he did recognize the man from the Knight Bus, he was unsure as to whether or not he should trust him. Quite frankly Harry had no reason to trust him. It wasn't like he told Harry on the Knight Bus that he knew his parents or anything. If he was trying to hide himself from Harry earlier, why should Harry trust him?

Once he entered the hallway Harry saw that Lexi immediately began heading up the stairs. Realizing it didn't matter where they had this meeting, Harry followed Lexi upstairs. Remus was only a few steps behind him the whole way.

As Harry entered what was now his and Lexi's bedroom he found the scene hadn't changed all that much. Sirius Black was still lying on the ground and Lexi was kneeling at his side with tears freely flowing from her eyes.

"He is really hurt," Lexi cried out while Harry just stared at the scene dumbly. Harry just didn't know what to do.

"Sirius?" Remus' voice cracked out. "What happened? Who did this?" The man asked without giving anyone a chance to respond as he knelt down beside Sirius as well.

Remus did not wait for anyone to answer him before he cast several spells over Sirius. After a few minutes of Remus' spell casting Sirius started to groan.

"Wow," was Sirius' first word. "That was one hell of a disarming charm." The convict continued as he began to get up.

"Take it easy, Padfoot." Remus said before asking, "What disarming spell?"

"Moony?" Sirius asked truly surprised to see the other man there. "What happened?"

"That's what I want to know as well," Remus said before turning to look at both Harry and Lexi.

Lexi shot Harry a dirty look before she began the narrative of that evening's activities. Harry himself needed the time to contemplate everything that had occurred over the last hour. His head was going to explode over everything that happened. Who should he trust? What should he do?

"Then when I woke up," Sirius began once Lexi finished her account of the evening, "I tried to find where the two of you went. Somehow I must have knocked myself out again in the process."

"I've got a few questions," Remus hesitantly started. "First, Harry, how did you learn the disarming hex? I know that it isn't a first year spell."

"My friend, Hermione, likes to study and learn a lot of different things." Harry replied while not meeting their eyes. "That spell was one of those things."

"Have you ever cast it before?" Remus asked.

"No," Harry replied. "That was my first time. Why?"

"Your spell was really over-powered," Remus explained. "I have no idea what would cause a spell to be over-powered, yet it happened. That is something I should look into."

Harry just nodded since he wasn't sure how to respond. It wasn't like Harry was asking the man to look into anything regarding his life. In all reality it made Harry a bit uncomfortable that Remus wanted to look into something regarding him.

"Now my next question is what did you do with the letter?" Remus asked.

"What letter?" Lexi voiced up.

"The letter from the ministry since Harry performed underage magic." Remus replied while trying to divide his attention between Lexi and Harry.

Harry looked at Lexi who seemed just as confused as he was, even though Harry knew it was against the law for underage wizards to practice magic outside of Hogwarts. Harry didn't care that he broke the rules. His sister's safety was the most important thing to him.

"No letter came," Harry eventually replied only to get confused expressions from both Sirius and Remus. Harry was a bit surprised with Sirius' silence but it seemed as though the convict was just taking everything in at this point.

"How very odd," Remus muttered, before continuing, "Now why did you leave the house, Harry?"

"I was trying to get to the Knight Bus to go to the Ministry of Magic for help because of Sirius," Harry said a bit hesitantly. Harry had reason to be hesitant since Lexi sent him a furious look in response to his words.

"That was a good plan, Harry," Sirius finally spoke up. "The only thing is I'm not your enemy."

"That's what I keep hearing," Harry replied looking at Sirius for the first time since he woke up. "The only thing is I just don't know if I can believe you."

"I saw him make a magical vow," Remus interjected. "His vow was that he would never harm you. He's one of the only people you can trust."

Harry just stared at Remus. Was that man for real? Why would he trust his word?

"That's nice," Harry eventually replied. "The only thing is, how am I supposed to know that I can trust you. I've never met you before today. I know nothing about you, why should I blindly trust you?"

Sirius and Remus, who were now standing next to each other in the living room, stared at Harry with wide open mouths. They didn't seem to anticipate Harry saying that. Lexi was also looking at Harry strangely but to him it looked more like pride than surprise.

"I, Remus Lupin, swear on my magic to never cause harm to a member of the Potter family." Remus instantly said as the room swelled with a golden aurora.

"I, Sirius Orion Black, swear on my magic to never cause harm to either Harry or Lexi Potter," Sirius mimicked Remus' oath as another aurora also filled the room after he gave it.

Unsure as to how to respond to the words of the men in front of him, Harry turned to Lexi for guidance. Harry already knew she implicitly trusted Sirius Black, but Harry knew nothing about magic oaths. Perhaps they were just trying to trick him. Maybe they just wanted to hurt him and Lexi.

However, there was a little voice in the back of his head telling him that couldn't be. If either of those men wanted to hurt you, they could have done so already. It was hard for Harry to deny that the voice had a point, even if he didn't readily accept it.

Looking at Lexi and her hopeful expression Harry decided to go out on a limb. Well, at least until he had the opportunity to go to Diagon Alley and get some books about blood wards and magical oaths.

While he had researched words and magical protections just before returning home from Hogwarts, he was by no means an expert. He was still a bit shaky on whether or not he should trust the information about the wards Remus Lupin had proved. It sounded on the level, but he couldn't risk being wrong. It wasn't just his safety that he had to be concerned about. What he wouldn't give to have been able to take a few of those books on blood wards home with him over break.

"Alright," Harry replied after what seemed to most as an eternity. "We need to talk some more about all of this."

As soon as those words left his mouth the sounds of a car pulling into the driveway could be heard in the small bedroom. Everyone seemed to either jump or be frozen in fear. The Dursleys had returned home.

"Can you apparate?" Lexi asked Remus.

"Of course," the older man replied.

“Good, because you are going to have to do that from here,” was Lexi’s brisk response. Harry was a bit surprised at how quickly and effectively his sister had taken control of the situation.

“Padfoot,” Lexi began while turning towards the sickly man, “Do you think you can climb out the window again?”

Before Sirius could answer, Remus cut into the conversation. “I can side-long him with me,” the man kindly responded for his friend.

“You better do it quickly,” Harry jumped in after hearing footsteps on the stairs. “They will be here any second.”

“We’ll get together tomorrow to talk about all of this,” Remus said with a nod as he grabbed Sirius’s hand.

There was a loud crack and both men were gone.

“Knock it off, you freak!” The enraged voice of Vernon Dursley came through the door.

Holding his breath, Harry waited for Uncle Vernon to enter the room. However, he never did. Instead Harry could hear his heavy footsteps continue along the hall and into the master bedroom.

“That was close,” Lexi whispered as she collapsed on the only bed in the room.

“Yeah,” Harry quietly agreed. The room was silent for several minutes before Harry decided to break the silence. “I’m sorry,” Harry whispered. He wasn’t exactly sure what he was sorry about, but he knew he had done something wrong where his sister was concerned.

“Me too,” Lexi replied with a steady trail of tears falling down her face. “I should have told you about Sirius sooner, but I was afraid you’d over react and they would take Sirius away from us.”

Harry held open his arms and Lexi instantly threw herself into them. They had never fought like that before, and as far as Harry was concerned he never wanted to fight with her again.

~*~

Lexi woke up early the next morning like always. For once in her life she realized that Harry didn't wake up like her at the crack of dawn. Lexi secretly envied her older brother, it was obvious that he had no reason to wake early at Hogwarts and was able to get a bit of a lie-in at school.

As soon as she thought those words, a large smile cracked out across her face. It was only a year and half before she too would be freed of Privet Drive and would be learning magic at Hogwarts. Snuggling closer to her brother in the small bed that they shared, Lexi truly regretted that she would eventually have to get up and start the day.

In the safety of the bed, she was able to dream. Her dreams were always such wonderful dreams about how wonderful their life could be. When she was a little girl she always dreamed of what life would be like if her mother and father had never died.

Her mother would have red hair just like she did when she was little, and the same green eyes that she would see every day in the mirror, while her father would have the messy black hair Harry was so well known for. Since she wasn't sure what color his eyes were, she would try to picture them as a variety of different colors. That way at some point she would have gotten the color right. Her personal favorite were hazel eyes with a touch of blue, gray and green in them.

But now that Lexi had Sirius in her life, her dreams took a completely different turn. Instead of dreaming of growing up with her parents, people she had only seen in a black and white picture a few months ago, Lexi began to dream of something she knew was possible. She dreamed that she and Harry lived with Sirius.

At first her dreams centered on what it would be like, if the wizarding world suddenly knew that he was innocent. How Sirius, holding a wand, would burst into the Dursleys' home and hex them into next week. Then she and Harry would grab the meager possessions they

owned and they would leave with Sirius. In most of the dreams, they would fly off on a fly motorcycle.

Lexi knew this dream was very unlikely to ever happen. First someone would have to believe that Sirius was innocent, and then they would have to convince others of the same thing.

So Lexi sat and waited, living with the Dursleys. Now that she had Sirius who cared for her like Harry did, things weren't so bad. He always wanted to help her with her school work, and see her marks when an assignment was turned back. Lexi didn't want to admit it, but that was one of the things she missed about her brother's presence the most, the interest Harry paid to the effort she made in school. Sirius wanted to help her and give her everything that was in his power to give her. Just like Harry.

Lexi sighed as she rolled over and looked at her brother. Sirius was so much like her brother that it was almost scary. The two of them were made from the same mold. They loved their family and would do everything they could to protect it. Lexi only hoped that her brother would one day see how similar they really were and would open his heart to let Sirius in.

They were independent. It was always them versus the world, Harry and Lexi, the only two people that mattered. But now the little world they created had grown. Harry had his friend Hermione that he did everything with and she had Sirius. Could their family grow to include them both?

~*~

Harry awoke to the mouth-watering aroma of bacon sizzling in the kitchen below his room. After taking a moment to regain his bearings, Harry remembered where he was. He was in the smallest bedroom of Privet Drive, because that was where he and Lexi now lived. Harry smiled at the thought of them having their own bedroom. For as long as he could remember that was what he wanted the most in the world, a bedroom for him and Lexi to share.

Getting up slowly, Harry quietly began preparing for the day. He had luckily avoided the Dursleys' presence the evening before, but it was inevitable for him to run into them at breakfast. The thought of breakfast reminded Harry of the scent that had awoken him, causing Harry to frown. The Dursleys had Lexi cooking for them now; Lexi had never mentioned that in any of her letters. That used to be his job and he secretly wondered what other chores that belonged to him were now her responsibility.

Once he was ready for the day, Harry gathered all of his Gryffindor courage and headed down the stairs. He was back from Hogwarts and it was time for more things to change around Privet Drive. If the Dursleys truly feared magic, like Lexi implied from her story on how she obtained their room, then he should be able to get the upper hand and change things at Privet Drive for the better.

~*~

Petunia was sitting in her customary seat at the kitten table, sipping tea while watching the youngest freak finish the fry-up. As she observed the little freak's movements she was secretly pondering the actions of the male freak. Petunia knew all too well that Dudley would be returning home for the holidays later that day and she wondered if the boy freak was planning on coming home as well.

That freak of a school he attended had sent them a letter just about two weeks previous. Upon sight of the letter Petunia had merely torn it up and later that evening she threw it into the fire place. However, now she greatly regretted not taking a peak at the information held within. Perhaps it was a notice letting her know when the boy would return from school.

But as soon as Petunia came up with that idea she shook it out of her head. That had been the third letter she received from that school since the boy began attending. The first had arrived just after Halloween and the second mid-way through the month of November. So it was entirely possible it was in regards to something else.

Perhaps the freak was flunking out of school? A twisted smile crossed Petunia's face at the mere thought of the boy being kicked

out of his magic school. If he was she would have him at her mercy once again. It was her job to try to control and decrease their freakishness. She told him, not in so many words, when he went to that freak school that she was done with him. The mere idea that he would return to her home was just too much for her to take. If he came back she would make his life hell.

Not more than ten seconds after Petunia began fanaticizing about all the ways she could punish the boy the door to the kitchen swung open. There he was, the freak was in her kitchen!

"What are you doing here?" Petunia hissed out, barely able to contain her anger. How long had he been there?

"I've returned for the holidays," the freak replied with a trace of smugness in his voice. Petunia began to fume at the freak's lack of respect.

"When did you arrive?" Petunia asked in a nicer tone. She was determined to rein in her emotions and gain control of the situation.

"Last night," the freak replied evenly. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the female freak stare at the boy. It seemed he was catching her just as off guard as Petunia was.

After pausing a moment to think of the implications that the freak had been in her house for several hours without her knowledge, Petunia began to see red. There was no way that little freak could be that cunning. But didn't she hear the girl place the idea for Vernon to agree to take her out to dinner with the Matthews, on the eve of Dudley's return home from school?

Petunia had been dead set on staying home the night before to make sure everything was perfect for her little boy. Well as perfect as things could be considering the fact Dudley had to lose his second bedroom to the freaks. Yet Vernon insisted they joined the neighbors. Why hadn't she seen the girl's involvement sooner?

Did that little freak know that the boy was to return the previous evening and got her and Vernon out of the way? As soon as those

words sunk in, Petunia began to feel a bit silly. There was no way that little brat was smart enough to pull something like that off.

"Well since you are here," Petunia could not prevent the sickening look from crossing her face at the thought of him in Privet Drive, "I'll form the list of chores for you to perform to prepare the house for Dudley's arrival."

"I don't think so," the boy said with some definite gall.

"Excuse me?" Petunia hissed, perhaps she hadn't heard him correctly.

"I said, I don't think so," the freak repeated. "Lexi and I will be responsible from this day forth to do the exact amount of chores you would assign to Dudley."

Petunia couldn't help herself but she began to stare at the boy with her mouth dropped wide open. Just who did he think he was?

"My friends from school," the boy continued, "were not really impressed with the way Lexi and I have been treated by you. Unless you want some of them sticking their noses into your normal lives here on Privet Drive, then you should treat all of the children living here the same."

Petunia knew she was gapping like a fish but she couldn't stop it. Where was the easily cowed freak that used to live in her home? Who was this boy before her?

"Understand, Aunt Petunia?" the boy asked after he pulled out the wand. She understood the implied threat. If she didn't agree to his new terms, then he would also be one of the freaks for them to fear.

"Perfectly," Petunia replied through clenched teeth as she rose from the table and headed upstairs.

What a mess this was! Vernon was not going to be pleased.

~*~

A/N: A huge thank you again to everyone who has reviewed. Please keep it coming. I seriously live off feedback to improve this fic. Zephy and Swanpride, thank you both of you for your awesome beta work on my story. I couldn't do it without either of you.

I've started a yahoo group to discuss my fics and Harry Potter in general since there have been some great discussions started by my reviews that I think a few people might be interested in joining in. Feel free to join: [http://groups .yahoo .com /group/forias_corner/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/forias_corner/) Just remove the spaces in the url or go to my profile and click on the website info.

Foria

Next chapter: Criminal Acts

Chapter 14: Criminal Acts

Harry had been home for two days now and his world was still spinning. Everything that he accepted as fact during the term about his parents and their death was wrong. It was hard to believe that Sirius Black was not evil. In fact, according to Lexi, Sirius was probably the only person he and Lexi could trust. It was just a lot to take in.

However, since Black did not act as a threat, Harry was going to give him the benefit of the doubt, at least for the time being, for Lexi's sake. Harry would still be cautious around Black, but Harry would not actively try to harm him again. Not that Lexi would allow him to fight with Black.

Lexi and her attachment to Black was another issue that concerned Harry. Lexi always looked to him for guidance and love. But now that Black was in the picture, Harry could see that she turned to him. Even though he knew it was foolish to do so, Harry felt as though he was losing his sister.

Today Harry and Lexi were to embark on their first journey together into the magical world together. Gringotts had wanted to meet with them, so Sirius insisted that they do so as soon as possible into the holidays. Even though Harry didn't trust Black, he could tell that the man was worried about something to do with the letter.

Sirius and Remus had arranged for Remus to escort the two children to Diagon Alley. Harry had attempted to protest this since he didn't necessarily trust Remus either, but Sirius put his foot down. Lexi and he were just children. They needed to have an adult accompany them into a public place, regardless of how Petunia and Vernon had treated them in the past.

The Dursleys were another interesting subject for Harry. Since he and Petunia, he refused to call her aunt anymore, had their discussion, the behaviors of the Dursleys had radically changed. Vernon and Petunia tended to ignore the Potter children's every move. The only Dursley who had any interaction with them was Dudley.

Dudley had been miffed with both Harry and Lexi since he returned home from school. He was very upset that his parents had given the freaks his second bedroom. However, Dudley was quite surprised when his mother refused to take it away from Harry and Lexi. Harry assumed that Petunia must have had words with Dudley since the lard did not actively taunt or tease them anymore even though he occasionally sent them dirty looks behind his parents' backs.

"That is horrible!" Lexi cried, her thoughts bringing Harry back to the present, where he had just finished telling the long overdue story of his first Quidditch match.

The three of them, Harry, Lexi and Black were sitting in a grove of trees near the playground park off of Magnolia Crescent. Even though there was snow on the ground, Black had taught Harry a charm to cast on them so they would not feel the cold.

Having Harry cast a charm served two purposes. Not only would it keep them warm while they were out in the crisp cold December air, but it also tested whether or not the Ministry could detect Harry performing magic at home. So far he was warning-free.

"So, you're saying that a swarm of Dementors attacked your Quidditch match?" Sirius asked with a dumbfounded expression on his face.

"Yes," Harry calmly replied. He had imagined lightly broaching the subject with Lexi, however, Black's presence and his superior knowledge of the wizarding world, was making it difficult for Harry to down play the seriousness of the situation.

"We're talking about the same Dementors that had been ordered to Hogwarts to protect you from me?" Sirius clarified.

Harry snorted at Sirius's question. That was definitely one way of looking at things. The foul creatures brought to Hogwarts to protect him, nearly killed him.

"I don't remember them reporting this in the Daily Prophet," Sirius continued scratching his forehead. "What did they say in their write-up of the incident?"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked genuinely confused.

"Well, this is an important news story. Dementors guarding Hogwarts attack students," Sirius said with his hands framing the imaginary headline in front of him. "What was their take on the incident?"

"Umm," Harry began a bit embarrassed, "I don't recall anything being written in the papers about this."

"Hmm," Sirius said while scratching his chin. "That is really odd; usually the Prophet would jump at a chance to report something like that."

A sudden crack altered the trio to the arrival of their missing companion. Remus Lupin appeared out of thin air in the hidden grove of trees Harry, Lexi and Black had been waiting in.

"Hey, Remus," Sirius said, not dropping their previous conversation, "Did you hear anything about the Dementor attack during Harry's first Quidditch match?"

Remus's eyes bugged out of his head. If Harry wasn't so embarrassed with the topic he would have laughed at Remus's expression.

"There was a Dementor attack?" Remus finally vocalized.

"Oh, yeah," was Sirius's response. Harry almost swore Remus and Sirius were having a silent conversation with each other due to the way the two of them kept staring at each other without saying anything.

"I think that is something that should be looked into," Remus finally said, before turning towards Harry and Lexi. "However, that is something that can wait for the moment since there are two children who are supposed to go to Diagon Alley today."

Lexi started giggling. She really seemed almost bubbly with the idea that she was about to enter the wizarding world's largest shopping district. Harry couldn't help but be excited in response to her attitude and behavior.

"Alright, let's go!" Sirius said while standing up. "We've got a Knight Bus to summon."

"Let's go?" Remus asked for the group. "We've got a Knight Bus to summon? Sirius, you are acting like you are coming with us."

"Of course I am!" Sirius replied in an indignant tone.

"No, you are not," Remus said with as much authority as he could muster. "Are you insane? Do you think you can just waltz down Diagon Alley with your godchildren without a team of aurors showing up to take you out?"

"Duh," Sirius said with a bored tone. "I'll be going as Padfoot. It's not like anyone knows of my animagus form. Right?" Sirius looked straight at Remus as if asking him something.

"I have never uttered your secret to anyone," Remus replied in a quiet tone.

"Well," Sirius began clapping his hands together, "I guess that means I can go."

Without further argument, Sirius transformed into Padfoot and started to run out of the woods. Remus rolled his eyes before following, and Lexi merely laughed at the behavior of their parents' friends. Harry couldn't fight off the smile that was threatening to show on his face. Perhaps this was what a real family was supposed to be like.

~*~

The ride on the Knight Bus was absolutely horrible. Harry was too preoccupied on his first journey on the Knight Bus to realize how bumpy and rocky the ride was. He had been too focused on finally

seeing Lexi again. However, this time he had Lexi sitting right next to him, she was sandwiched between him and Black in his dog form.

Every few moments the bus would sway back and forth causing Lexi and Harry to crash left and right with the movement of the bus. Lexi seemed to be enjoying it, as if it were an amusement park ride, while Harry just couldn't wait to get on solid ground again. Harry almost chuckled at the thought of how Lexi would react to the cart ride to their vault once they got to Gringotts.

It was decided that the first thing their small group would do was go to Gringotts and meet with Ragnok. Then take some money out of the Potter vault and go Christmas shopping. Harry knew for the past few days since he had shared his plan with Lexi, she had been bouncing around unable to hide her glee at the prospect of shopping.

After what seemed like an eternity to Harry, the Knight Bus finally stopped at the Leaky Caldron and odd group made their way off the bus. The wind blew around them as they headed towards the pub and the entrance way to Diagon Alley. Pulling down on his hat, Harry was glad that Remus had the foresight to pick him up a baseball cap to wear that day. With all this wind there would have been no easy way for Harry to keep his fringe covering his famous scar. The last thing he needed was people constantly gawking at him all day.

The quick walk through the pub lead them to the brick wall and the entrance point to Diagon Alley. Harry suddenly wondered if bringing Sirius along in dog form was a good idea. In the muggle world, animals were not allowed in stores. However, the conductor of the Knight Bus never batted an eye as Sirius jumped onto the bus. Perhaps, people viewed pets differently in the magical world?

A cracking sound coming from the brick wall shook Harry from his thoughts. Remus had pressed his wand on the bricks in the correct code to open the hidden door. They were about to enter the center of the magical shopping district. It was more wonderful then he had remembered.

A sudden gasp from his right made him turn his attention to Lexi. This was her first time seeing Diagon Alley and that was a special

experience. She was looking at everything with wide open eyes, as if she was attempting to see everything that Diagon Alley had to offer from the brick entrance way.

“Ready?” Remus asked as Harry realized that he too was standing as stationary as Lexi was.

“Of course!” Lexi said as she began to bounce on her toes, apparently unable to hold in all her excitement. Padfoot barked excitedly as he began to prance around her as the two of them followed Remus into the alley.

Harry slowly followed behind the three of them. He was truly amused at Lexi’s reaction to Diagon Alley. With all of her excitement rushing forward, Lexi began gliding around gracefully looking at everything the alley had to offer. Her moments were so fluid and full of life, Harry almost swore she was dancing. He had never seen Lexi this excited or genuinely happy before and it broke his heart. With her small frame and adorable features, she almost looked like a dancing pixie, so innocent and sweet.

Lexi deserved so much and he failed to deliver on it. Harry knew deep down that it was Petunia and Vernon were supposed to be the ones providing for Lexi’s happiness, but since they didn’t it was his responsibility. Something had to change. The only problem was, Harry wasn’t sure how to do that.

Before Harry knew what hit him, they were standing in front of the massive doors to Gringotts bank.

“I’ll be waiting right out here for the three of you,” Remus said quietly from Harry’s left. Sirius had thought it was best for just Harry, Lexi and himself enter the bank. Since Sirius was their godfather he had a right to be at the meeting while Remus could not boast the same.

“We won’t be long,” Lexi said with a large smile plastered to her face. Harry stared shamelessly at her smile. He would work very hard to make sure she smiled more often.

~*~

Lexi was in a state of constant awe. Everything around her in Diagon Alley was far more exciting and wonderful than she could have ever imagined. Harry and Sirius did not do it justice in their descriptions. Once they had entered Gringotts Bank, her small family politely waited in line to speak with the goblin their meeting was with. Even though they had a scheduled appointment, Sirius had told them before they left to wait in line.

According to Sirius, the secret of dealing with goblins was to show them respect. Not many wizards and witches bothered to show the goblins who managed their finances the proper respect. For that the goblins did no more than the bare minimum to assist them. Just a hint of respect and dignity towards a goblin would go a long way in improving a person's portfolio.

Standing in line was not very exciting. Lexi wished she could go explore around the lobby of the bank, however, Harry had put a quick stop to that. As soon as she went to wander off, Harry grabbed the sleeve of her jacket preventing her from walking away.

"Please, Lexi," Harry said in a low voice, "Just stay here with me. While we are in the wizarding world, please just stay close by."

Lexi merely nodded her head in agreement. It was the same speech he gave her before they left Privet Drive. Even though she thought it was stupid for her to need to stay within arm's reach of Harry, she would do it to keep him happy.

After waiting for twenty minutes, it was finally their turn. Lexi nearly skipped as she and Harry made their way to the available teller. However, before Harry could reach the open teller, a pushy, small woman wearing a green robe with a black bow on the top of her head walked in front of them. Lexi hissed back a foul word she learned from Sirius.

That rude toad! How dare she just walk in front of them like she and Harry weren't even there!

Taking two deep calming breaths, Lexi tried to center herself. She didn't want her hair change color in the middle of the bank because she was angry. Sirius had told her that was an ability best kept a secret. Instead of letting herself get mad, she kept all of her attention on the toad like lady. Lexi was determined to learn more about her.

"I am the Undersecretary of the Minister!" The toad exclaimed in a very rude voice when Lexi began to eavesdrop. "Don't you understand who you are dealing with?"

Lexi nearly giggled. This woman obviously had no idea how to deal with the goblins. If this woman was an example of an employee of the ministry of magic, then Lexi wanted nothing to do with the magical government. Not only were they disrespectful, but they had hurt her family.

Suddenly Lexi noticed the woman had placed her carpetbag on the floor near her feet while she was telling the poor goblin off. Sticking out of the woman's carpetbag was a slender piece of wood, a wand.

A wicked thought suddenly crossed Lexi's mind. Since Sirius escaped from Azkaban he did not have the privilege of having his own wand. Didn't the ministry kind of owe him one? It would be so simple for her to merely grab the wand while the witch's attention was still on the goblin in front of her.

However, before Lexi could decide to do anything, another teller had opened up and Harry grabbed her arm and pulled her away from the toad-like witch, Padfoot following quickly behind.

Oh well, perhaps this was for the best.

~*~

"Key," the goblin asked without ever lifting his eyes from the ledger in front of him.

"I'm sorry, sir," Harry replied in the most respectful voice he could muster. "I am not here to visit my vault. My sister and I have a meeting with one of the managers of your fine establishment."

The goblin slowly lifted his eyes off the ledger, and took a long moment to study Harry and Lexi. Harry suddenly felt very nervous to be examined so closely. Yet, before Harry could say or do anything the goblin began, "I'm sorry Mr. and Miss Potter, please step over here and Griphook will take you to the location of your meeting."

Suddenly Padfoot jumped on the counter and barked at the teller.

"I see," the goblin muttered. "Yes, you should join their meeting. It was a wise decision for you to come as well."

Harry shared a wide eyed look with Lexi. Apparently goblins spoke dog.

Harry and Lexi went over to the area that goblin had pointed to with Sirius not too far behind. Not more than a few seconds later, a goblin appeared before them.

"Mr. and Miss Potter and guest?" the goblin asked in what could be considered a friendly tone.

"Yes," Harry replied. He decided long ago he would be the spokesperson for their group.

"Please follow me," the goblin said as he quickly began to walk away.

Harry, Lexi and Sirius were merely a step behind the goblin. The long and winding corridor was a sight to be seen. Everywhere Harry looked there were statues and beautiful paintings lining the walls. At Hogwarts the art work reflected wizards and events of great importance in the wizarding world. Here in the inner sanctum of Gringotts everything was goblin-related, which in a way made sense due to the goblin nation being the ones in control of the bank.

Lexi for her part looked as though her eyes were going to completely pop out of her head. She looked as though she was drinking in all of the sights and sounds related to bank. Harry had to admit that this back area was far more impressive than anything he had seen when he visited his vault for the first time. Apparently the goblins took much

more interest in the area where they worked compared to where the wizards frequently visited.

They were ushered into a small room with only a large table in it. To Harry it looked as though it was a conference room of some sort.

"Ragnok will be with you shortly," Griphook said with an eerie smile before he left them alone in the room.

"Wow, Harry, this place is so cool!" Lexi enthused as soon as they were alone. "What do you think, Padfoot?"

Sirius barked happily in reply to Lexi's question. Harry idly wondered if this was typical behavior for the two of them. It's not like Sirius would walk around Surry in his human form. Perhaps she would talk to him, and he would attempt to reply using barks?

Before Harry could explore that thought any further, the door on the far side of the room opened to reveal a very old goblin standing in the doorway. The goblin held himself with an air of importance, and Harry instinctively believed him to be Ragnok.

"Mr. and Miss Potter, thank you for coming," the goblin said as he entered the room and took a seat at the table opposite Harry and Lexi. "Mr. Black, no one here will expose your secret, please feel free to transform into your real form."

Just like the goblin asked, Sirius changed back into his human appearance and took a seat on the other side of Lexi. "Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me and my godchildren, esteemed Ragnok."

"The pleasure is all mine," Ragnok replied with a toothy smile. "Now that the pleasantries are out of the way, shall we move on to business?" Ragnok looked directly at Harry when he asked the question and Harry immediately nodded in the affirmative. "Splendid!" the goblin said while clapping his hands together above the table.

"When Mr. Potter came to visit his vault in September, he asked the goblin he was speaking with to perform an audit on his account,"

Ragnok began to explain. "We were not permitted to perform an audit on an account without the permission of one of the account holders. In the case of the Potter family account, we needed the permission of either Harry James Potter or Alexa Lily Potter."

Harry just stared at the goblin, unsure if he was supposed to say anything at this pointing. Looking next to him, Harry could tell that this was not catching Lexi's interest. She seemed to be off in her own little world, mentally speaking.

"The results of our audit," Ragnok continued and Harry turned his attention back on the goblin in front of him, "were a bit shocking. Were any of you aware that the wills of Lily and James Potter were not read?"

Harry shook his head in the negative, and then he turned and looked towards Sirius. He seemed just as confused as Harry was.

"Since the late Mr. and Mrs. Potter's wills were not read, the inheritances of Harry and Alexa Potter were not properly placed into trust," The goblin exclaimed a bit nervously in Harry's opinion.

Harry had no clue as to what that meant, however, Sirius was furious.

"Who prevented the wills from being read?" Sirius demanded to know.

"Albus Dumbledore was the Wizengamot member who blocked the reading of the wills," Ragnok replied.

Sirius began cursing up a storm. He jumped up out of his chair and began pacing the room for several minutes. After he started to calm down he retook his seat as if nothing had happened.

"Where does this leave my godchildren's finances?" Sirius asked in the most solemn tone Harry had ever heard from him.

"The Potter family account has one hundred and two galleons and three knuts in it," the goblin replied.

Harry's heart immediately dropped out of his chest. This was bad. They didn't have any money.

"What happened to all the money that was in my vault?" Harry spoke up. Truly confused since it seemed that he had a small fortune in his vault the last time he was there.

"The only withdrawal since your visit in September was the tuition fee for attending Hogwarts," Ragnok readily replied.

Harry knew that most of the things being said by Sirius and Ragnok were well over his head. However, at least Sirius knew what was going on.

"Who has taken the most?" Sirius asked after a few moments of silence.

"Surprisingly it was the Abbott family," Ragnok replied to Sirius' confusing question, "With a withdrawal of three thousand galleons. Most families only requested a thousand to two thousand galleons, probably not realizing how much damage their small request would cause. However, there is an impressive list of families who demanded assets from the Potter estate, thus draining most of the estate's resources."

"What does that mean?" Harry asked, a bit frustrated since he didn't know what was going on.

"When a will is not probated in the wizarding world, a relative by blood, no matter how insignificantly connected has an opportunity to claim an inheritance from the deceased wizard or witch," Ragnok replied. "For example, Lucius Malfoy claimed an inheritance of one thousand galleons from the Potter family in the name of his wife, Narcissa Black Malfoy. Mrs. Malfoy was born a Black, just like your grandmother. Therefore, the Malfoys have a right to inherit."

"That is just utter crap," Lexi exclaimed, speaking up for the first time. "It's like those people decided to steal from us since our Mum and Dad died."

Ragnok flashed Lexi a wide toothy smile. "I completely agree with you, Miss Potter. However there are a few things you need to know." Ragnok took a few moments to consider his words before he continued.

"Your situation is so dire because your parents drew up a will after the birth of Miss Alexa Potter," Ragnok said folding his hands on the table in front of them. "Had your parents remained will-less, the Potter family vault would simply be locked up until the next member of the direct Potter bloodline attempted to access it. Since there was a will, any blood relation could contest it to gain some form of an inheritance."

"With the Potters' will not being read, distant blood relations could simply make a petition with the ministry to obtain funds as an inheritance," Ragnok continued. "We could not lock one of the vaults due to there being a will, and unfortunately due to ministry law we were forced to distribute the funds as the ministry ordered."

"Vaults?" Harry asked. Had his parents had more than one?

"Yes," Ragnok replied. "We were able to lock one of the vaults listed under the Potter family assets, due to it being opened by Mrs. Lily Evans Potter. Since she never changed her name on the vault paperwork to Potter, only her direct blood relations can access it."

"Was the contents of this vault mentioned in the listing of the children's assets?" Sirius asked.

"No," Ragnok quickly replied. "There was no money within the vault, only material objects."

"What if you just give Harry and Lexi access to the House of Black vault?" Sirius asked, trying to come up with a solution to their problem. "That way they can have as much cash as they need."

"Unfortunately, due to the regulations of the House of Black account created when it was opened, only born Blacks may have access to the account," Ragnok regretfully explained.

“Well, take a couple hundred thousand galleons from the House of Black vault and give it to the children,” Sirius said regaining his cool. “That way the kids won’t have to worry about any money for a while.”

“Could I make a suggestion?” Ragnok quickly interjected.

“Go ahead,” Sirius replied.

“It may be best if we open new vaults for both Mr. and Miss Potter,” Ragnok began. “That way no one else can claim inheritance rights on this money. Personal vaults are under a different set of rules than family vaults,” Ragnok said turning toward Lexi and Harry, as if that explained why his idea was better. For the most part Harry realized it did.

“Alright, that sounds good to me,” Sirius said while rubbing his chin.

Harry almost objected to this plan. If he didn’t completely trust Black, he didn’t want to be in Black’s debt either. However, Lexi was watching him and elbowed him in the side, preventing Harry from saying anything.

“May I have a word with Mr. Black alone?” Ragnok asked Harry and Lexi.

Lexi nodded in the affirmative, pulling Harry out of his chair and out of the room.

~*~

Ragnok reclined back in his chair as he surveyed the man in front of him; Sirius Black, the innocent convict. The goblins were well aware that Peter Pettigrew was still alive. His will was never released to be probated. How stupid wizards could be sometimes. There had to be someone who worked for the Wizengamot who would have noticed this as well. Unfortunately, if someone did notice this, who knew where that person’s loyalties lied with.

The goblins of Gringotts and the ministry were having difficulties at this point. The ministry kept trying to take more and more liberties

with the goblin nation and their rights as defined by the last goblin/wizard treaty were being encroached upon. The goblins were just waiting for the next civil war to breakout between the wizards. When that happened the goblins were not going to be siding with the ministry. Perhaps the Potter family and the injustices they too had faced at the hands of the ministry was just the catalyst the goblins needed to start that war.

The goblins had considered backing Voldemort during his insurrection against the main populist of the wizarding world back in the 1970s. Unfortunately, Voldemort was an arrogant wizard who would have made things worse for the goblin nation. The fact that he tried to steal from one of the Gringotts vaults just a few months earlier was a perfect example of why the goblins had chose well in ignoring Voldemort's offers of alliance.

"So," Mr. Black began, bringing Ragnok back to the present. He seemed a bit lost as to why he was here alone when this meeting was to be about the Potter family. "Why do you need to speak with me without the children?"

"Mr. Black, I'm here to make you an offer you can't refuse," Ragnok replied while smiling at Mr. Black with his kindest smile.

"What kind of offer are we talking about?" Mr. Black asked his interest was clearly peaked.

"You and I both know the Ministry of Magic will never clear your name," Ragnok began, watching Mr. Black for any sign of agreement. When Mr. Black nodded his head, Ragnok felt free to carry on. "Do you really want to spend the rest of your life hiding as a dog?"

From the look on his face it was clear that Mr. Black would rather do anything other than that. "So, what are you proposing to do about it?"

"You're going to die," Ragnok bluntly replied. "And an identity of your choosing will be born for you to use to live out the rest of your life and gain physical custody of your godchildren."

The look of shock on this wizard's face was one that Ragnok would remember for a long time. Obviously the man had considered his future options several times, but Ragnok doubted that he every thought of anything as permanent as what he was proposing.

"How?" was all Mr. Black could say when he finally regained control over his motor skills.

"Well it's quite simple really," Ragnok replied. "We will liquidate all of the assets of the House of Black. We would divide the money into three main accounts, the one for Mr. Potter, Miss Potter, and your new identity. This way the ministry would have no control or access over any of the funds tied up to the House of Black."

Mr. Black raised his hand to stop Ragnok; it appeared that the man had a question. "How would you have the ability to do this?"

"The accounts for the House of Black have been tied up since the death of your mother," Ragnok patiently replied. "You are the sole head of house. Since you were incarcerated you had no ability to access the account. Your cousin's husband, Lucius Malfoy has made several attempts over the years to take control of the Black family fortune. However, since you lived, he had no claim to it. Only you have the power over the House of Black accounts."

"Basically, I can liquidate all of the assets; pretend I die and then leave Narcy and Lucy only two knuts to rub together?" Mr. Black asked with glee in his eyes.

"Yes, you may," Ragnok replied a little surprised at the pettiness of this particular wizard. Taunting the Malfoy family into thinking they would inherit a fortune but only really leave two knuts. That would be only something a goblin would do. Perhaps this wizard had some goblin ancestry?

"Why are you helping me?" Mr. Black finally asked the question Ragnok was most hoping to answer.

"You are the guardian of Mr. and Miss Potter by all rights," Ragnok quickly began. "The wizarding world has treated neither Potter heir in

the way they deserved. I have no idea why Dumbledore refused to read the Potter will but the consequences are devastating for those children.” Ragnok steeped his long fingers in front of his face before continuing.

“I fear that the Potter children may accidentally lump us goblins in with the wizards who had hurt them,” Ragnok continued. “We know Mr. Potter is destined for great things and we would rather have those two children see us in a favorable light. By helping you, it will help us achieve our goal.”

Mr. Black nodded his head in understanding.

“So, how am I supposed to go into public under a new alias?” Mr. Black asked. “I know I could use glamour charms or such, but that would run the risk of coming undone in the magical world. Or am I just supposed to pretend I am a muggle?”

Ragnok could not hold back the large tooth filled smile he shot Mr. Black.

“Have you ever heard of a muggle procedure called plastic surgery?” Ragnok saw Mr. Black shake his head in the negative. “It’s a process to permanently change a person’s appearance without magic...”

~*~

Lexi had been patient for so long. She knew everything that they were going through at Gringotts was very important. For crying out loud, they needed money to be able to attend Hogwarts! The only thing that really caught her interest during the meeting was the fact that Albus Dumbledore was the reason she and her brother were poor.

If it wasn’t for Sirius they wouldn’t even have enough money for either of them to attend Hogwarts past Harry’s first year. But Sirius, her wonderful godfather fixed everything and she had nothing to worry about. Now that the specifics had been figured out, she was more than ready to get on with the rest of the day. She wanted to see everything that Diagon Alley had to offer.

But here she was with Harry, merely standing around in the back hallway of the bank, waiting for Sirius to finish. Lexi started to walk a little bit away from Harry. She wanted to look at all the pretty pictures and things on and near the walls.

"Lexi, stay here," Harry commanded. "I don't want you to get lost."

Lexi couldn't help but roll her eyes. "Harry, I just want to see the beautiful art work," Lexi said in a bit of a whine, but she knew that would do nothing for her brother.

"If I may," the goblin that brought them to the meeting, Griphook, interrupted their sibling spat. "I would be willing to accompany Miss Potter around the bank while Mr. Black and Ragnok's meeting concludes."

Lexi shot Griphook a brilliant smile. She knew Harry wouldn't be able to refuse without seeming rude.

"Are you sure that would be no trouble?" Harry asked cautiously.

"Positive," Griphook replied with a toothy smile.

"Alright," Harry reluctantly agreed.

Lexi grabbed a shocked Griphook by the hand and pulled him quickly away from Harry.

"Thank you," she began as they walked down the hallway, "for getting me away from my brother. For some reason he has been way too over protective today." Lexi turned to look Griphook in the face only to notice he had a very shocked expression on it. "Is something wrong?" She instinctively asked.

"I'm sorry, Miss Potter," Griphook said once he regained his composure. "Wizards usually never touch creatures that are seen as below them."

"Oh!" Lexi said terrified that she had insulted him. "I'm the one who is sorry; I hope I didn't offend you?"

"Of course not, Miss Potter," Griphook replied. "I am truly honored that you do not see yourself as above my station."

"Why would I?" Lexi asked a bit confused about the customs of the wizarding world. "You and the rest of the goblins at Gringotts have been nothing but nice to me and my brother. Why would we be better than you? We're all magical; shouldn't we all be seen as equals?"

"Most wizards have a very different opinion," Griphook said solemnly.

"Sirius told me about that," Lexi said with a disgusted look on her face. "They are wrong you know."

"Perhaps they are, but they are set in their ways," Griphook replied regretfully. "Your brother is right to worry about you here in the magical world. There are many elements out there who would try to cause harm to either you or your brother because of who you are. Unfortunately, your brother made many enemies at a young age."

"Voldemort's supporters?" Lexi asked even though she knew she was right.

"I am surprised that you do not fear his name," Griphook replied with wide eyes.

"He's gone," Lexi replied with a shrug. "It's not like he can hurt anyone any more. Voldemort is just a name."

Griphook looked a bit troubled for a moment, as if he was debating on whether or not he should say anything. However, he eventually spoke again.

"There are many people in our world who believe that Voldemort is gone," Griphook began. "But there are still a select few who don't think he is completely dead, as if he wasn't human enough anymore to die." Griphook's eyes bore into Lexi, trying to get her to understand the seriousness of his words. "It is very likely that Voldemort may not

actually be completely dead. You and your brother need to be aware of this.”

Lexi knew that look on her face must have been one of complete shock and horror. Griphook, the kind goblin, had just said her parents’ killer may not be dead and implied that he might come after her or Harry. This was not good. She would have to talk to Harry and Sirius about this later in the evening.

“Umm, thank you for warning me of this,” Lexi said in as confident of a voice as she could muster. She felt like something very important had just happened that perhaps she didn’t completely understand yet. But it was time to go back to their original purpose, or Harry might just cancel the rest of the day’s activities.

“Will you show me with the various pieces of art work are?” Lexi asked Griphook, truly interested in goblin art.

“Of course, Miss Potter,” Griphook readily agreed.

As the unlikely duo began to explore the various pieces of art work related back to goblin history, the pushy toad like woman from earlier in the day came thundering down the hallway. The woman’s fat cheeks, green cloak and black hair bow still reminded Lexi of a large toad with a fly stuck on its head.

“The Minister of Magic will be hearing about this!” the woman shouted as she was being escorted by two goblins from what looked like a conference room. “I will be in contact with the Department of Magical Creatures!” the woman continued to holler.

“You,” she thundered pointing towards Griphook. “Get these idiots off of me!”

Griphook reluctantly was sucked into the dispute with the rude toad woman. However, there was one thing that caught Lexi’s eye. The woman’s carpetbag was held loosely at her side, and the same wand from earlier was sticking out of it, right next to Lexi’s hand.

As far as Lexi was concerned this was fate. Sirius needed a wand, and here was one for the taking. Carefully, while everyone's attention was directed elsewhere, Lexi slipped the wand out of the bag, and put it up the sleeve of her shirt.

Immediately the guilt of stealing crashed down on her, so Lexi quickly and quietly took several steps back from the woman and the wandless carpetbag. Lexi continued to repeat one thought over and over again in her head. She had to take the wand, she and Sirius needed it.

After five minutes, Griphook was finally able to escape the woman's angry clutches and rejoined Lexi.

"I am very sorry you had to see that," Griphook apologized for the woman's behavior.

"That woman was so rude!" Lexi firmly declared and Griphook began to laugh.

Lexi smiled at the croaking laughter coming from Griphook. Goblins were really fascinating creatures.

~*~

Harry was getting rather impatient. Sirius seemed to be taking forever, Lexi had walked off with a goblin, and he was stuck waiting for both of them. Harry hating having Lexi out of his sight but he couldn't refuse the goblin's offer without sounding rude. Now he just paced back and forth waiting for Lexi to return and his fears could be put to rest.

"Thank you again," Sirius's voice could be heard as he exited the conference room. Well that was one member of their party returned. As soon as Sirius stepped out of the room, he immediately transformed back into a dog.

Not more than ten seconds later Lexi came strolling around the corner talking with Griphook. Alright, everything seemed to be normal and no one seemed to be hurt. But that didn't mean Harry could stop himself from being cautious where his family was concerned.

“Harry!” Lexi cried as she turned the corner. “You would not believe all the stuff related to goblin history around this building. According to Griphook, only one wizard has ever bothered to study the full history of the goblin nation. What was his name again?” Lexi asked turning to Griphook.

“Cuthbert Binns,” Griphook replied with a toothy smile. Harry idly wondered if he was related to the Hogwarts History of Magic professor.

“Well, you should be heading off now,” Ragnok’s voice caught Harry off guard. He hadn’t noticed the other goblin joining them. “It has been a pleasure doing business with all of you. We will owl each of you with the information we have discussed.”

With those final words Harry, Lexi and Sirius were escorted to the main entrance of the bank.

“Alright!” Lexi cried when they exited the building. “Time to go Christmas shopping!”

Sirius barked in agreement and Harry couldn’t hold back his laugh of joy as they joined Remus. His family’s good mood was infectious.

~*~

Dolores Umbridge was a very important woman, thank you very much. As the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister she was responsible for a wide range of very important tasks. Why for instance today, she had to go to Gringotts to collect information on how much they paid their employees.

The ministry felt Gringotts was over inflating the job market and stealing valuable potential employees from them. This had to stop. Those goblins had strict guidelines that they had to follow based on the laws the ministry had created. The greedy, filthy bankers would have to bow to the power of the ministry.

Of course they initially refused to comply with her wishes. Now she was going to go back with a team of aurors to force the goblins to follow the law. Dolores walked back into her office and placed her handbag on her desk. All that was left was to fill out the auror requisition form.

Dolores reached into her bag to grab her wand, however, it wasn't there. She began to panic. Dumping the contents of her bag all over her office floor she searched and searched for her wand. But it wasn't there. Dolores saw red.

She knew she had her wand before she entered the bank. Someone or something had to have stolen her precious wand. Her wonderful yew and unicorn hair wand that was perfect to use for bureaucratic work. Those damn goblins would pay for what they had done.

Stomping out of her office, Dolores grabbed the closest employee that she could.

"Get me Amos Diggory," Dolores roared at the shaking mid-level bureaucrat. "Get him for me now!"

~*~

This had to be one of the best days of her life, Lexi mused as she, Harry and Sirius returned to Privet Drive. Remus Disapparated from Diagon Alley, after seeing the three of them onto the Knight Bus and Lexi was kind of sad to see the man go. While she wasn't his greatest fan, she knew that Sirius trusted him. Since Sirius trusted Remus, Lexi knew she should do so as well.

The rest of the afternoon had gone by in a flash as they went shopping around Diagon Alley. Ragnok had given Sirius a bag full of galleons from his family's vault so Harry and Lexi could use the money to buy Christmas presents. Harry was hesitant to take Sirius's money so willingly but it's hard to fight with someone giving you puppy eyes.

After spending two hours shopping, they were done gathering all the gifts they needed and a few extra things for themselves. Harry had insisted that she get an entire new wardrobe, and he picked up a few

more items for himself. Sirius and Remus had watched over the whole thing approvingly. The two Marauders seemed just as excited as she and Harry were about the clothing changes.

The book store was amazing and Lexi and Harry had greedily purchased several books for themselves. Lexi had noticed that two of the books Harry chose were about blood wards and magical oaths. She decided to read them as well after Harry was done, even if the magical concepts may be over her head.

All and all it was an exciting and magical day. Now that they were walking home, Lexi knew she had to tell Harry and Sirius about her conversation with Griphook.

“Um, guys,” Lexi hesitantly started. “Can we talk when we get back to number four?”

“Sure, Lexi,” Harry readily agreed and Sirius barked his consent.

The odd trio walked to the shed behind number four, where they had spent a lot of time talking over the past few days. After they closed the door, Sirius immediately changed back into his human form.

“So, what’s up, pixie?” Sirius asked. Pixie was Sirius’s new nickname for her. Lexi didn’t necessarily appreciate the name since he had decided on it due to how riled up she could get. Apparently when ticked off, Lexi reminded Sirius of a vengeful pixie.

Ignoring Sirius’s use of her nickname, Lexi launched into a retelling of the conversation she had with Griphook. Immediately Lexi could tell that both Harry and Sirius were upset over what she was sharing. Once her story was over, everyone stayed silent for a few minutes.

“Damn it,” was all Sirius could say. Harry just looked speechless.

“Why should we be afraid of Voldemort’s followers?” Lexi asked but she wasn’t done with just one question. She had several hours to think about what she wanted to ask. “Why would they be after us? And for that matter, why did Voldemort try to kill Mum and Dad?”

Sirius knew her questions had been addressed to him, and he took a deep breath before launching into his tale.

“You see,” Sirius began looking between her and Harry, “Before Harry was born, a prophecy was made...”

~*~

A/N: Thank you everyone who has reviewed, you guys motivate me to keep on writing. A huge thank you to swanpride for helping me workout the kinks in this chapter, and to zephy for her beta work. I will be looking for an additional beta who is strong with spelling and grammar to assist me for a few weeks while zephy is recovering from surgery. If you are interested send me a pm or an email. If not the chapters won't be up to snuff until zephy gets back.

One more chapter till we're back at Hogwarts. I guess this is becoming my new theme song: Ripple, ripple, ripple... Let me know what you all think of the latest changes. ;-)

Foria

Next Chapter: Holidays with the Grangers

Chapter 15: Holidays with the Grangers

Harry was still deep in thought as he and Lexi quietly entered number four. The Dursleys were focused around the television in the living room, the focal point of their lives. Both Petunia and Vernon completely ignored their entrance while Dudley merely gave them a sneer. It didn't matter what the Dursleys did or what they thought anymore. They were inconsequential in the big picture. They were merely a family of bullies and bigots.

Harry realized that it felt good to recognize them for what they were and how they didn't matter to him. As a young child, he had tried to earn their love and kindness. Obviously, all his attempts had never amounted to anything. For a long time, deep down inside Harry had desired their praise, approval and love. But now he was finally past that, he had people who loved him for who he was and didn't want him to change.

As Harry continued to walk up the stairs to his and Lexi's bedroom, Harry couldn't help the smile that crossed his face. The Dursleys might share blood with them, but family was more than a blood connection. It was love and friendship. Family was people who would support and help you. Family was the people in your life that gave you strength. For him, Lexi, Hermione and even Sirius were all the family that he currently needed.

Lexi grabbed Harry into a bone-crushing hug as soon as he shut the door. Harry could feel her body shaking in sobs as he held her close. She always tried to put on such a strong face in front of the world, yet she never held anything back from him.

"Shh," Harry whispered into her hair, even though she wasn't actually making any noise. Lexi and Harry had learned to cry without sound at a young age. "Everything is going to be alright. I'm going to be okay, you'll see. I bet Voldemort isn't even around anymore."

"I'm such a horrible person," Lexi whispered and her statement caught him off guard.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked his concern evident in his tone.

"I wish it was the Longbottoms," Lexi answered. "I wish Voldemort had chosen the Longbottoms. Then mum and dad would still be alive and we would have been normal magical children."

"We are normal, Lexi," Harry half-heartily replied. But he couldn't deny Lexi's bitter laugh at his statement.

"Harry, we've never been normal," Lexi said pulling away and wiping the tears away from her eyes. "And we will never be normal. Normal children don't have prophecies about them which require them to kill a dark wizard."

"You could be normal," Harry replied not meeting her eyes. "You could get away from all of this Lexi. You could go your own way and have nothing to do with me to keep yourself safe."

"Hush," Lexi said as she covered his mouth with her hand. "Don't even think things like that. We're family and we are in this together."

Harry pulled Lexi into a hug. He knew he should encourage Lexi to go her to not get involved, and to protect herself and her own interests. However, he was selfish enough to be glad that she wanted to stand beside him no matter what could happen.

~*~

Sirius nervously ran his hand through his hair as he darted up the small walkway to Remus' door. After the meeting in Gringotts, Sirius all but promised to come to visit Remus once the children were safely inside the Dursley home. Remus had been instantly concerned about the length of time it had taken the three of them inside and bank. Now he had to tell his only friend the troubling news.

The house his friend lived in was little more than a shack, being a werewolf was hazardous to one's financial wealth. However, as soon as Sirius stepped on the porch, everything about the humble home screamed Remus Lupin. The porch had been patched up, with a solitary rocking chair sitting on it. A small table was next to the chair

and a well worn book was resting on it. Sirius couldn't help but chuckle at the nature of the 'serious' Marauder.

There was no need for Sirius to knock on the door since it swung open as soon as he was relatively close to it.

"Come it quickly," Remus said while pushing Sirius into the small entrance hall. Sirius couldn't help but notice Remus scanning the darkness of his yard, as if looking for someone.

"Did I catch you at a bad time?" Sirius began to tease. "Are you waiting for a hot date?" Remus looked momentarily taken aback before the stern expression once again crossed his features.

"This isn't a laughing matter, Padfoot," Remus began scolding. "I can't believe you could have been so irresponsible as to come here in your human form."

"Relax, Mooney," Sirius said with a boyish grin crossing his face. "You live out in the middle of nowhere. It's not like there is anyone around to see me."

"Padfoot," Remus began while shaking his head in anguish, "I didn't want to make you worry, but there have been people, most likely from the ministry watching my home since your disappearance act."

"What?" Sirius asked the humor slipping from his face. "How do you know?"

Remus just tapped his nose and Sirius leaned back against the wall contemplating this knowledge. Of course Remus could sense people near his house due to his advanced senses. Being a werewolf, Remus couldn't help but be bombarded by the intruders scents. But if they were watching Remus that meant the ministry thought his quiet friend was helping him while he was on the run from the law. As a werewolf, Remus had enough problems to deal with as far as the ministry was concerned. Sirius shouldn't be adding to his friend's burdens.

"Now don't be alarmed, Padfoot," Remus began while placing a reassuring hand on Sirius' shoulder. "I didn't smell anyone else out there tonight. Since it is close to the holidays, perhaps the ministry didn't have enough employees to continue surveillance on my home." Remus finished, while misreading Sirius' concern. At this point though, Sirius remained quiet on his guilt, he didn't need to throw anything else at Remus tonight.

"Sorry, Mooney," Sirius eventually replied while rubbing the back of his head. It was a nervous habit he had picked up during their Hogwarts' days. Lily had smacked him on his head one too many times for doing something stupid for the phantom pain to ever go away when he was in the wrong. "Umm, I came here to talk to you about what happened at Gringotts today."

"Yes, I was wondering what had kept you all so long," Remus said while rubbing his chin. "Let's go into the lounge and you can tell me all about it."

After sitting on a moth eaten sofa Remus had placed in what had to be the smallest room of his home, Sirius began to tell his friend all about the strange meeting he had with the goblins and his conversation earlier in the evening with Harry and Lexi. After he was done with the initial stories, Sirius began to unload all of his concerns to his werewolf friend.

"I agree with you, Padfoot," Remus began. "It does sound like the goblins are up to something. As far as I am concerned what they told you and the children in regards to the missing Potter fortune is absolutely hogwash. There is no way that other pureblood families could have taken any of the children's money, will or not."

"I know I'm horrible when it comes to legal things, but I'm no dummy," Sirius said unable to keep his frustration out of his voice. "What are they trying to do, especially telling children that Voldemort can return?"

"I don't know," Remus replied in a solemn tone. "All I can suggest is that you play along with whatever the goblins are up to at this point."

It's not like an escaped felon and a werewolf can go to the ministry with this bizarre information."

"So, you are saying I should go forward with the plastic surgery?" Sirius asked hesitantly, he wasn't sure about that part of the goblins' plan.

"Yes," Remus replied instantly. "It's actually rather ingenious. It's too far below pure-blood and the ministry's notices for them to keep up with the latest procedures muggles have developed to change one's appearance. It may actually be the only way for you to live as a free man once again."

Sirius sighed accepting Remus' view on things. His friend really did have a point. However, he didn't feel like he could trust the goblins and he was afraid of them having something like the knowledge of him getting appearance changing surgery to hold over him.

"Alright," Sirius reluctantly agreed. "And in the mean time I can begin liquidating a few of the Black assets into muggle currency and institutions just in case there are any problems. You know our Marauder motto, 'always be prepared'."

Remus snickered, "I still can't believe you and James decided to steal the cub scouts' motto for our own."

"What?" Sirius complained defensively. "It's good for pranksters to be prepared, and they were cubs, you know like werewolves have cubs? To us it all fit!"

Remus burst out into laughter as the rest of the evening broke out into a time of laughter and joy. It had been far too long since the last of the Marauders had a chance to laugh and joke with one another and they spent several hours reminiscing and joking about the past.

After it was well into the night, Sirius finally returned to Privet Drive in his animagus form. He only paused to look up at bedroom window he knew was his godchildren's and he knew in that moment he couldn't be prouder of his godchildren. They knew what was in store for their family and they would not shy away from their responsibility to each

other. James, Lily, Sirius thought to himself, look at your children and be proud. Help me protect them and give them the life they deserve.

~*~

The next morning was just like any other. No one, not Harry, Sirius nor Lexi brought up the discussion about the prophecy from the previous evening. Any outside would consider their little trio to be just like any other small family, two kids and their dog, enjoying a day at the park. However, the three in question were walking on eggshells. All three were afraid that at any point something would happen that would remind them of the prophecy, and that was one thing they all wanted to forget.

Due to the dire subject matter of the conversation surrounding the prophecy, Lexi had forgone mentioning her special acquisition from the day before. She knew Sirius would be extremely excited to have a wand to use again, but last night just wasn't the time to bring it up. It's hard to be cheerful or excited about something as silly as a wand when you were talking about a matter of life or death. However, since everyone seemed to be ignoring the prophecy at this time, Lexi thought it would be perfect to bring her new wand to the attention of Sirius and Harry.

The Potters and Sirius were walking through the snow covered park to their favorite meeting place. While it didn't seem like much, the grove of evergreen trees at the edge of the play park was the perfect place for them. The snow covered pine trees provided cover from the park and the road so that nobody would notice Sirius in his human form and it was a pleasant change from the Dursley home.

There may be a shed that Sirius slept in and spent most of his time in, while Lexi was inside the house, however, once she was outside and able to see Sirius the poor man just needed to get away from that shed. Lexi could completely sympathize with her godfather and his desire to be as far away from the shed as possible when he could. It reminded her of the cupboard she and Harry shared for most of their lives. While it was convenient and it was theirs, they had no desire to spend every waking minute in that shed.

Once they reached their special area, Harry pulled out his wand and cast a few warming spells on them as Sirius turned back into his human form. Their little clearing had an over turned tree trunk laid out across the middle of the clearing for them to be able to sit on, so they were not forced to sit on the snow covered grass. Harry cast a cushioning charm on the tree trunk so that it would be a bit more comfortable. As Harry performed his spell work, Lexi was memorizing the incantations and the wand movements. She just couldn't wait until she would be able to cast spells like that on her own.

"I've got something to tell you!" Lexi said once everyone had taken a seat. She was so excited that she kept bouncing around.

"What is it, pixie?" Sirius asked with a laugh in his voice.

Lexi momentarily frowned at the use of her new nickname, but her excitement over the wand didn't hold her back for long.

"When we were at Gringotts, I got a wand!" Lexi cried out, brandishing the wand from the sleeve of her jacket.

Harry and Sirius had gob-smacked expressions stuck on their faces. Lexi couldn't prevent herself from giggling at their silly reactions. It was just a wand, it wasn't like she took a priceless artifact from a vault or something.

"A wand?" Sirius finally asked once he regained control of his motor functions. "You got a wand? How?"

"I took it, silly," Lexi replied while still giggling.

"You took it from where?" Harry asked with narrowing eyes.

"Well, there was this toad-like lady who worked for the Ministry of Magic and was completely rude," Lexi began her story, while rolling the wand between her fingers. "She wasn't very careful with her carpetbag, which her wand was sticking out of it. When she wasn't playing attention since she was yelling really loudly at the goblins, I took it."

Sirius clapped his hands appreciatively at the end of her story. However, Harry just looked at her with a look of complete horror on his face.

“You stole a wand from a witch?” Harry asked his face never shifting away from his mask of horror.

“I didn’t steal it,” Lexi said dismissively. “I liberated it!”

“That is still stealing!” Harry said as he jumped off the log. “How could you do something like that? You could end up in jail from stealing from someone, did you ever stop to consider that?”

Lexi frowned and felt like she was about to cry at what Harry was saying. No, she hadn’t thought about the fact that she could go to jail for stealing it. She was just concerned about herself and Sirius once Harry left. She was afraid about the way the Dursleys would behave once the wand was out of the house. Having her own wand that she could brandish at them when they stepped out of line was for her protection. Couldn’t Harry see that it was better for her to have one?

“Now, now,” Sirius began patting the near tears Lexi on the arm, “no harm, no foul. I’m sure Lexi didn’t think about her actions when she took the wand. I doubt anyone would send a small child for jail for a simple misguided mistake. I’m sure Lexi had the best of intentions in mind.”

Lexi couldn’t respond. There was a lump in her throat that made it too difficult for her to speak. She never thought Harry would be mad at her for taking the wand. Lexi actually thought he may have been proud of her for her quick thinking. After taking a few deep breaths she was able to nod her head in agreement with Sirius’s previous words.

“We need to return that wand,” Harry stated without room for argument. “We can’t keep it here, it isn’t right. Some witch is probably missing that wand very much.” After a deep sigh, Harry continued. “Lexi, you don’t understand right now, but a wand is like an extension of a person. The wand chooses the witch or wizard that will purchase

it, since it will be best suited for their magic. The witch that lost that wand will miss it like she lost her arm."

A horrified look crossed Lexi's face at the thought of taking someone's arm away from them. She truly didn't understand how important a wand was for a witch or wizard.

"Now, let's not be hasty," Sirius began before Lexi could comment. "What's done is done. Lexi do you remember the name of the witch you took the wand from?" At Lexi's negative head shake, Sirius continued. "Well it's not like you want to tell the wizarding world, that Lexi stole a wand, right Harry? We wouldn't want Lexi to wind up in Azkaban." Harry too shook his head in the negative.

"Then I guess we should keep this wand, however, I will be the one to take possession of it," Sirius said as he took the wand out of Lexi's hand. "Since Lexi should be punished in a way for liberating it. Now Lexi," Sirius said, wand in hand with a silly frown on his face, "no more stealing wands!"

Lexi couldn't prevent the smile that curled onto her lips as she nodded her head in agreement. She turned to look to Harry, only to see the disapproving look still on his face. Sirius might have been able to quickly accept that Lexi stole and move on, but Harry still looked like he was very disappointed in her for her actions.

Sirius gave the wand a few experimental waves as he performed some very simple spells. Lexi was quite amazed at the display since she had never seen her godfather cast any magic before.

"I wonder what the core is," Sirius said with a frown on his face. "It's not very compatible with me, however, it will get the job done." With those muttered words, Sirius began to perform some very complex transfigurations to the clearing. Providing arm chairs for the three of them to sit on. Far more complex than the spells Harry had performed.

Looking over at Harry, Lexi desperately wanted him to change his expression; however the look of disappointment remained. She really wanted his expression to change to one of him being proud of her, instead of the look of disappointment that marred his face. She was

so angry with herself that he was mad with her actions. However, she really could be upset with herself for stealing in the first place. The problem was Lexi was proud of herself for taking the wand. She was just upset that she ended up disappointing Harry.

~*~

The call from Hermione had taken the Potter family off guard. Apparently Harry's best friend was a bit more clever than he ever gave her credit for. Hermione had been well aware that it was highly unlikely that the Potters had a place in the Dursleys' celebrations of the holidays, so she invited them to join her family for Christmas dinner.

Christmas morning flew by with a flash. When Harry had woke up, Sirius was waiting at the end of the sole bed for the Potter children to wake up.

"Come on," Sirius said in a bit of a whine as he danced from foot to foot. "It's time to open presents! It's been Christmas morning for hours!"

"What are you doing in here, Sirius?" Harry asked with concern. "You shouldn't be here, especially in your human form."

"Come on, kiddo," Sirius said with a boyish smile plastered onto his face. "You only live once. If life didn't have a few risks, it wouldn't be worth living."

However, instead of waking Lexi, the two men waited for her to wake up on her own. Harry didn't understand why his godfather was so excited about opening presents. It wasn't anything really important, but still his excitement was infectious as the time began for them to open their gifts.

Harry belatedly realized that his lack of excitement probably stemmed back to him never really celebrating the Christmas holiday. Since there was never a really big gift exchange, he didn't really understand what a big deal it was to some people. However, with each gift he opened from Lexi, Sirius, and even Remus, Harry grew more excited.

At first he thought the large amount of presents designated to him was a waste of money. He surly didn't need that many gifts. However, with each present he opened, Harry noticed Lexi and Sirius seemed very pleased with his reactions. They were just as joyful as he was to see that he had enjoyed their gifts. Perhaps receiving gifts was just as much fun as giving gifts.

Harry had spent a lot of time and truthfully a lot of money on his gifts for Lexi. The two of them had been denied the right to enjoy Christmas for so long he wanted to make this Christmas extra special for her. And apparently she wanted to do the same for him.

After all the presents were opened and everyone had time to thank the others for their gifts, the trio trooped downstairs to make a Christmas brunch.

Since things became tense with Petunia and Vernon, Sirius had been purchasing food for Lexi and Harry to eat. Sirius marked the items with magic marker 'Property of the Potters' that was placed in the larder. Harry had made it quite clear to the Dursleys that it would be in their best interest not to eat any of the food purchased for the Potter children. If you tell them it was made with magic, they wanted nothing to do with it.

Since Vernon, Petunia and Dudley were at Christmas mass it gave them plenty of time to make and eat a feast compared to what the three were accustomed to. All in all this had to be the greatest Christmas ever for Harry and Lexi, and it had just begun.

Harry just couldn't wait until it was time to go to the Grangers.

~*~

The Grangers lived in an average-sized home just outside of London, according to Harry. It wasn't a far bus ride, especially if you were taking the Knight Bus. Lexi was a bit surprised to see the same conductor and driver on the bus, as the day of their Diagon Alley trip, but Sirius, who was hidden with concealment charms, told her it was normal.

Since no one wanted to work on the holidays the company that owned the Knight Bus would petition the Ministry of Magic for Time Turners for their employees. That fact that there were devices that could rewind time had taken Lexi completely off guard. Especially since those devices were controlled by the Ministry of Magic. The idea that the ministry had the power to bend and change time and events to fit their will completely scared Lexi.

However, there wasn't much time to dwell over that. Before Lexi knew it, they had reached the Granger home. While Harry had described it to her as an average-sized home, it seemed anything but that to Lexi. As far as Lexi was concerned, the Granger home was a mansion.

Lexi was scared. These people were obviously better off than the Dursleys. What was a girl like that doing hanging around her brother? Was she only interested in him because of his fame?

But before Lexi could continue her line of thought, the door of the house flew open and a girl with bushy-brown hair ran out the door and crushed Harry into a hug. The girl wore a dress that had to be really expensive.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so glad to see you!" the girl, who must be Hermione cried.

"I missed you too, Hermione," Harry replied while breaking the hug. "This is my godfather, John Patrick Evans, and my sister, Lexi."

Sirius stepped forward and extended his hand towards Hermione. "Nice to meet you, Miss Granger. Please call me JP."

Lexi didn't think she would get used to Sirius's appearance. He was the same height and size that he usually was but his face was completely different. His eyes were green, and almond shaped. His lips were fuller than they usually were and his nose was a bit smaller than it should be. Not to mention his hair was blonde instead of its usual black.

"It's really nice, Mr. Evans," Hermione said flashing him a winning smile. Lexi had to stifle her laugh at the girl's buck teeth. The Grangers were dentists. Shouldn't Hermione have gotten them fixed? Besides, if she had buck teeth like that, you would never catch her flaunting them like that. She should keep her beaver-like teeth hidden.

"JP, Miss Granger," Sirius said while shaking a finger at her. Lexi didn't like the way Sirius was teasing Hermione. He was only supposed to tease her!

"Only if you call me, Hermione," Hermione replied without missing a beat. This was getting sickening fast. However, before Lexi could react, Hermione turned her attention on Lexi.

"I've heard so much about you," Hermione began. "I'm glad we finally got to meet in person." At that point Hermione pulled Lexi into a bone-crushing hug.

Lexi was beginning to freak out. What was this girl doing? They didn't know each other!

"Umm, nice to meet you too," Lexi squeaked out once Hermione let her go. She couldn't meet the older witch's eyes.

"These are my parents, John and Jean Granger," Hermione said not missing a beat. Lexi hadn't even noticed the two adults step on to the porch.

The greetings continued around the group as Hermione excitedly ushered everyone into the home. Lexi didn't know how to react to the hug she had received. The only people who had given her hugs in the past were Harry and Sirius. This was a new, uncharted situation for Lexi. All she knew for sure was that she wasn't comfortable around Hermione Granger.

~*~

Jean Granger was very proud of her very unique and brilliant daughter Hermione. Ever since she was a small girl, Hermione always proved to be above the curve and exceptional in every way.

When she received a letter from Hogwarts School of Witch Craft and Wizardry, Jean knew that she shouldn't be surprised that her daughter wasn't just amazing, she was magical.

However, even though Hermione was extremely intelligent and always did well with her studies, her brilliance was also her downfall. Her primary school teachers were frequently outwitted by Hermione so it was no surprise that the other children were intimidated by Hermione's drive to excel in school. That being said, Hermione never had a true friend in all of her time attending school.

Of course some children were nice to her and frequently asked Hermione over to their homes to help them study or work on projects. However, once the term was over, her daughter never heard from those other children again. It seemed that most children Hermione's age had only wanted her for her brain, not her personality.

When Hermione had first written saying that she made a new friend, Jean was honestly worried that this other child only wanted her for her brain. But as the term progressed and Hermione began to share stories of how her friend Harry had helped her with her flying lessons, Jean suddenly wondered if perhaps this boy would turn out to be a true friend.

This Harry seemed to be different from any other child Jean had encountered. From what Hermione told Jean, Harry was seen as a bit of a celebrity in their world due to the fact that he survived some special spell. Harry seemed to like her daughter for who she was, and that endeared the young boy to Jean instantly. For a celebrity he seemed very down to earth, this seemed like a very good trait for a boy who was her daughter's friend.

Throughout their meal that evening, Jean was certain that at some point Hermione's face would split open due to all of the grinning that her daughter did. It was certainly good to know that her daughter was happy with the choices that she made in choosing friends.

And his younger sister was a sight to be seen. While Hermione had told her that the girl was two years her junior, the poor thing looked four to five years younger than Hermione. She seemed very quiet and

shy, yet Mr. Evans seemed to bring a bit of life out of the girl, whenever she seemed a bit depressed. If Mr. Evans wasn't such a kind man, she would have sworn that the girl had been malnourished and abused.

All throughout dinner the Potter children were very polite. The entire time they showed the best of behavior. In all honesty, the two children acted like miniature adults instead of children. Perhaps that was why they seemed to get along so well with her daughter. What had surprised Jean the most was how familiar Hermione acted around the youngest, Lexi. Jean knew Hermione never met the girl before, but she was acting like they were good friends. Maybe Hermione had been writing to the girl during the first term?

"So, Mr. Evans," Jean began as they were finishing their first course. "How are you related to Harry and Lexi?" While Jean knew he was their godfather, she secretly wondered if there was another connection between them as well.

"Well, I'm their mother's cousin," Mr. Evans replied with a very charming smile on his face. "She and I were always particularly close, much closer than she was with her sister, Petunia. When both Harry and Lexi were born, she and her husband, James, who was also a good friend, named me to be the godfather of their children."

"That's very interesting," John replied jumping in on the conversation. "However, I thought Hermione told us that Harry lived with his aunt?"

"Yes," Mr. Evans responded with regret clear in his tone. "I was out of the country when Lily and James passed away. Therefore, both of the children were placed with Petunia, who doesn't particularly care for them. I'm currently in the process of taking custody of the children. I hope to have everything straightened out by the summer."

Jean slightly frowned at what Mr. Evans had just told her. That simply seemed a bit farfetched.

"Why doesn't Petunia like them?" Hermione asked much to Jean's shock and dismay.

"Hermione!" Jean began to scold. "That was a very inappropriate question."

"But a fair one," Harry replied in a low voice.

"You see," Mr. Evans began addressing Hermione's question, "Petunia had never cared for magic. She was quite jealous that Lily was a witch, while she was just an average muggle. That jealousy turned into a hatred of all things magical. Since Harry and Lexi are magical-"

"She hates them," Hermione said quietly, rudely cutting Mr. Evans off.

"Yes," Mr. Evans agreed before an uncomfortable silence filled the room.

This time Jean was unable to lessen the frown on her face. If he knew that the woman hated his godchildren, then why didn't he do something sooner? This was definitely something that she would have to look into. It was just too strange. For the sake of Christmas, she wouldn't do or say anything now, but once the holidays were over, she would have to get to the truth behind JP Evans.

Jean sighed as she realized that she was going to have to have another discussion about what was right and proper. Hermione could not go through life asking inappropriate questions. No daughter of Dr. Jean Granger was going to be that rude.

But now dinner was done and Jean had to wonder how long the Potter children would be staying in their home. She had to admit each of the children had drawn her to them through their individual traits. Jean honestly hoped that the children would visit Hermione frequently on school breaks.

"Mum," Hermione began once the table had been cleared. "Can we go upstairs?"

"Sure, dear," Jean said with a smile. She was so glad that her daughter had a chance to experience some child-like pastimes such

as playing with her friends in her room. It wouldn't be much longer before Hermione would be too old to do such things.

Hermione dragged both Harry and Lexi up the stairs to her room, and Jean couldn't help but chuckle. The children really were cute to watch together. After the children were out of ear shot, the adults moved into living room to enjoy an after dinner drink.

"So, Mr. Evans," John began. "Tell us more about yourself."

Surprisingly Mr. Evans looked as though John had suggested he crawl over broken glass. That was an interesting reaction. Jean made a mental note of it as she began to listen to his every word. She would dissect every part of his story to find the truth.

~*~

"Wow," was all Hermione could say in response to the story that Harry had told her. "Wow. I just can't believe it!"

The Potter child and Hermione were crowded around on the floor of the bedroom sitting on a few beanbag chairs that Hermione owned. She had explained to the Potter children that she loved sitting in beanbag chairs as she read books, they helped her relax. So, as Harry told her the story of his holiday, and all the crazy things that had happened, they sat in a small beanbag circle.

"Tell me about it," Harry muttered as he leaned further back in his seat.

"So your godfather, Sirius Black is downstairs having tea with my parents?" Hermione asked with a small grin on her face.

"Yes," Harry hesitantly replied.

"The same Sirius Black that is a wanted mass murderer?" Hermione asked with a bit of a giggle to her voice.

“Yes, but as I told you, he was innocent,” Harry continued, clearly unsure as to what Hermione was going for.

But after he said that, Hermione burst into a fit of giggles. “I’m sorry,” Hermione eventually said. “My parents are just so straight-laced. I just can’t imagine them ever having dinner and a long conversation with a wanted felon.”

“Technically, he never had a trial,” Lexi finally participated in the conversation. Hermione hadn’t noticed till that point that the small girl hadn’t said a word.

“Yes, I know that,” Hermione said a bit dismissively. “It’s still rather funny to me, even knowing that the wanted criminal is in fact innocent.”

Hermione didn’t miss the sour look that crossed Lexi’s face. That was an unexpected reaction.

“I just can’t believe what has happened since break,” Hermione continued while watching Lexi.

“Tell me about it,” Harry replied. “I even went out and bought some books on magical oaths and wards to see if Sirius had been telling me the truth.”

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione replied turning her attention solely on him. “From what you told me everything JP told you was correct. You really shouldn’t worry about that.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed while running his hand through his hair, something Hermione knew he tended to do when he was upset. “I came to that conclusion as well as to the books I bought. It’s just a lot to take in.”

“I understand Harry,” Hermione replied although she distinctly heard a snort coming from Lexi’s direction. “Perhaps things will be easier after you go back to Hogwarts. There will be some distance between the two of you, and you can try to get to know each other through

letters. That way you won't feel like he is pushing himself on your family."

Lexi muttered something at that point, but it was too low for Hermione to hear. Harry, on the other hand, heard everything Lexi had said.

"That's enough, Lexi," Harry said with a hard edge to his voice. "That was uncalled for."

"Whatever you say, big brother," Lexi snapped in response before jumping up and leaving Hermione's small bedroom.

"What was that all about?" Hermione asked clearly confused by Lexi's behavior.

"I have no idea," Harry said as a dark look crossed his features. "She has been acting weird since we got here."

"Have I been a bit too forward with her?" Hermione began to fret. "I know I've never met her before today, but I feel as though I have known her for years. Perhaps I should have toned down my behavior a bit."

"Hermione," Harry said while placing a hand on her shoulder. "Whatever is wrong with Lexi has nothing to do with you. Don't worry about it. I'll figure out what was wrong once we get back to Privet Drive."

Hermione took notice of the fact that Harry was still not calling the Dursleys' house his home. She had hoped when Harry told her about Sirius, that perhaps he would feel as though he had a real home, but sadly that was still did not appear to be the case.

"Alright, Harry," Hermione reluctantly replied. "But you will let me know if there is anything I can do to help, right?"

"Of course," Harry said while pulling her into a hug. "You're family too. You are just as involved in this as anyone else."

A huge smile graced Hermione's features as she heard what Harry said. She was a part of his family. She loved her parents, but that didn't stop her from including Harry in her family. It didn't take away from her parents; the size of her heart had just grown to add Harry and Lexi as well.

~*~

After they got off the Knight Bus, Harry and Lexi said a quick goodbye to Sirius before they made their way into Privet Drive. Sirius seemed to have noticed the tension between the two siblings, if the worried look on his face was any indication. However, that didn't matter. Harry knew Lexi was pissed, and he was equally furious in return.

"Where have you been?" Vernon bombarded them with the question the minute they walked through the door.

"We were out." Harry sharply replied. "Where we were is none of your business."

"Now see here-" Vernon began but Harry instantly tuned him out. There was nothing that Vernon had to say that would interest Harry.

Lexi seemed to be of a similar mindset as Harry as she pounded up the stairs. Harry could do nothing but follow her, knowing that they were going to have it out. Lexi was going to have to get over whatever issue she had with Hermione.

Harry walked into their bedroom and shut the door behind him. Lexi was staring out their sole window, but Harry knew she was breathing rather heavily.

"What is your problem?" Harry asked in a firm tone.

"How could you?" Lexi shrieked as she turned around. When she did, Harry could see that her eyes were brimming with tears.

"What?" Harry dumbly asked, he was taken off guard by her question. Regardless of what he told Hermione, he was sure she was Lexi's

problem. Now it looked like he was the route of the problem and he didn't know how to react to that.

"How could you just betray Sirius and me like that?" Lexi began, her face was turning red due to her extreme anger. "How could you just tell her his secret?"

"Are you mad because I told Hermione about Sirius?" Harry asked trying to process what Lexi was saying.

"Yes!" She screamed. "How could you do that?"

"I tell Hermione everything," Harry hesitantly replied. "I wouldn't keep that from her. She's my friend."

"She is someone you've only known for a couple of months!" Lexi countered. "Now we have trust her to keep Sirius's location a secret. For all we know she could be contacting the Ministry as we speak telling them where he is. Within a hour Sirius could be gone!" Lexi wailed out the last word as she broke down into sobs.

What was wrong with her? Why was she getting all worked up over this?

"I trust Hermione with my life," Harry said as calmly as he could, still trying to make peace. "She will keep his secret."

"It wasn't... your decision... to make," Lexi said between sobs.

"Well, excuse me," Harry replied. "No one told me I had to get approval before I told someone about Sirius."

A dark look crossed Lexi's face and Harry was scared. He had never see his sister so angry before. Her tears instantly stopped and her hair started to rapidly change colors between black and red. Harry started to back towards the wall, unsure as to how to react to Lexi in this state.

"You freaking git!" Lexi hissed. "You are a complete ass!"

"What did you just say?" Harry asked starting to turn red. How dare she start calling him names? He did nothing wrong.

"You heard me," Lexi replied in a snide voice, "Ass!"

"Oh, like your one to talk, princess," Harry began throwing caution to the wind. He wasn't going to take being talked to like that from anyone, including his sister. "What were you thinking by befriending a murderous convict? I warned you about him, but you seemed to ignore my opinion and made friends with him and invited him into our lives. There was no way you could have known at that time that Sirius would not hurt you."

"I can make my own decisions," Lexi said with a stubborn look on her face. Harry realized by bringing up her initial befriending of Sirius, he had taken her off guard.

"And so can I," Harry countered. "I wanted to share that information with my friend and I did. I told Hermione about Sirius and she will keep it a secret. End of discussion."

"Like you can trust her," Lexi scuffed. "For all you know she only wants to be your friend because you are the Boy-Who-Lived. She's rich and maybe all she wants is the fame that the Potter name would bring her."

"What are you talking about?" Harry asked, more puzzled than angry.

"Come on," Lexi said throwing her hands up in exasperation. "You told me her family had an average-sized home, when in reality their home was easily two times the size of the Dursleys. Then she starts acting like she is my best of friend as well, trying to be all chummy with me. We were strangers, what was she thinking?"

"Hermione is very expressive of her feelings," Harry started in defense of his friend. Harry was a bit confused as to why he thought Hermione was rich. Her parents were both professionals so they lived well, but they weren't exactly rolling in the dough. "She has listened to me go on and on about you. She has been waiting to meet you for

months. I've told you before, she's like family and she sees you too as family even if she never met you before."

"Well maybe I don't want her to be a part of my family," Lexi yelled. "I'm just fine with you and Sirius. I don't need some rich, pompous, know-it-all to pretend to care about me as well."

"How dare you?" Harry screamed seeing only red. "Hermione cares about us. You take that back!"

"No!" Lexi shouted, crossing her arms in front of her chest. "There is no way in hell you'll get me to take that back!"

"Well you're not going to make me accept Sirius," Harry countered. "I don't care if he is our godfather, I want nothing to do with him. We were better off without him!" Harry hoped his words would cut Lexi just like her words had hurt him.

"And what about you stealing that wand?" Harry continued to roar. "Sirius obviously isn't a good influence on you if you are beginning to exhibit illegal tendencies since he came here!"

"You stupid prat!" Lexi cried as a loud bang echoed through the room.

"You FREAKS!" Vernon yelled as he banged on the door again. "Open this door immediately. I'm going to teach you proper manners!"

Apparently they had been loud enough to draw the attention of the Dursleys. Deciding to end this for the last time, Harry flew the door open, fingering his wand which was concealed in his sleeve.

"I don't know or care what the two of you were yelling about," Vernon began as he advanced into the room. "But I am going to show you what happens to freaks who don't behave in my home!"

"Petrificus Totalus," Harry shouted, fed up with listening to Vernon's rant.

Instantly Vernon Dursley turned as stiff as a board and fell to the floor. His eyes were wide as he stared motionless up at Harry who was towering over him.

"I told you there would be consequences," Harry told the frozen man. "Both Lexi and I can do magic now. It's no longer open hunting season on the Potters, got it?"

While Vernon couldn't communicate, Harry wasn't going to take no for an answer. Using the levitation charm, Harry lifted Vernon off of the floor and moved him into the master bedroom and unceremoniously dumped him onto the bed.

"This will wear off in a few hours," Harry said while leaning over Vernon to stare at him directly in the eyes. "The next time you threaten or hurt one of us, our response will not be temporary, it will be permanent." With those final words Harry marched out of the room.

"What did you do to him?" Petunia asked from the stairway, where she watched Harry move her husband into their room. Her fear was evident in her voice.

"I merely put him in a Full Body-Bind," Harry said as nonchalantly as possible. "He was lucky I was in a generous mood. I hope there will be no repeats of tonight's behavior."

"No... there shouldn't be," Petunia hesitantly replied. She had a sour look on her face as she said it.

"Good," Harry said with a nod of his head. "Good night, Petunia, sleep well." At Harry's final words Petunia looked sick. That was good, she had taken Harry's words as the threat he intended.

Petunia rushed into her room, and Harry was finally free to go back to his argument with Lexi. Now that he had been away for a few minutes, he already regretted some of his words to her. But Lexi had to see that she wasn't the only one making the rules. She had to know how upset he had been when he learned about Sirius.

However, before Harry could enter the room, Lexi was walking out with an arm load of blankets.

"Where are you going?" Harry asked very concerned with her behavior.

"Back to my cupboard until you leave," She snapped. "I can't stay here with you any longer. I never want to talk to you again!"

With that, Lexi pushed her way past Harry and headed down the stairs. Harry just looked on in shock, unable to understand exactly what had just happened.

~*~

A/N: Wow... I am shocked by the output of reviews last chapter. I'm still working through replying to all the reviews. Hopefully some of the things covered in this chapter will clear up some of the points. I never said the goblins were being truthful last chapter to Harry, Lexi and Sirius. Remember, Ragnok wants to use the Potters to be the catalysis another wizard civil war... I won't explain anymore but you should all be able to figure out why the goblins acted the way they did in the last chapter. If you can't just contact me. ;-)

Alright, enough author rambling... A huge thank you for everyone who reviewed! Thank you swanpride for your words of encouragement in helping me shape this chapter to where I wanted it to be. Also, thank you zephy for the last chapter you have beta-ed for me before your surgery. I spoke to her a few times this week over the phone and she is doing well and is resting at home right now for everyone who was inquiring as to her health. She will be back in a few weeks but I'll miss her till she returns.

From this point on, grammatically speaking I have no beta. Please forgive me if I make any huge mistakes. If anyone is interesting in helping beta for me please contact me. You've got a desperate author here.

Foria

Next Chapter: The Trouble with Hogwarts

After another long day at work, Foria slowly dragged herself into her kitchen, dreading her next stretch of training classes she would need to teach. It seemed that day after day she was stuck working weird hours that never allowed for her to even turn on her home computer, yet alone write. Sighing she turned on her kitchen light, only to be startled by the sight in front of her.

Sitting at her kitchen table was none other than her own original character, Lexi Potter.

“Hello, Foria,” the small brunette began while drumming her finger on the kitchen table. “It is good to see you alive. Many of us thought you dropped off the face of the earth.”

Behind the small witch was none other than Sirius Black. The man was wearing sun glasses and had a very nice suit on. He was gripping on to the back of Lexi’s chair. To Foria, the message he was trying to send was clear. Lexi was the brains while he was the muscle of this operation.

“Umm, yeah,” Foria replied looking a bit sheepish. “Sorry about that but work has been utterly insane. Unfortunately, it looks like things are only going to get worse till after the beginning of November.”

“That is understandable,” Lexi stated while staring the author down, “however, you should still let the readers know you haven’t just up and died. It’s been over two months they should have gotten something from you by now.”

A nervous grin crossed Foria’s face as she started to explain her actions. “I’m so sorry. Honestly, it just seemed that time has flown by. I really haven’t noticed that it’s been that long. Like I said real life has taken up my free time.”

Lexi merely gave Foria a pointed look while Sirius cracked his knuckles. Foria could hear a thumping noise coming from her hall closet and she wasn’t sure she wanted to know what was in there especially if it was somehow connected to the two characters in front of her.

“Well, I’ve also suffered from a case of writer’s block and a vicious attack of the plot bunnies.” Foria continued a bit afraid of the character her mind created. “Turns out writing out the end of the school year conflict before I actually got there was a bad idea. But the next few chapters should come quicker now since I know how to go forward from this point on.”

“That’s really good to know,” Lexi said as creepy smile crossed her face. “Now we won’t have to use the closet.”

“What’s the deal with the closet?” Foria asked against her better judgment.

“Oh, that’s where we transported all the characters that have yet to make an appearance in this fic but are slated to be in it,” Lexi replied nonchalantly. “Ginny is especially anxious to get into the story. If I were you I’d fear them more than you fear the readers who are dying for an update.”

Foria stared in the direction of her hall closet with wide eyes. She of all people knew exactly how feisty and evil Ginny and Luna could be when mixed together without proper guidance. Sometimes it was scary to plan out the future of her fic. Those two, while fun characters, could be evil if they wanted to be. Foria was just glad that they were on Harry’s side.

“Now here is your laptop all set for you to write the next chapter,” Lexi said in a no nonsense tone of voice. “I don’t like fighting with my brother and I feel like you are leaving me hanging. Wrap up this fight, and the school year. Then we can plot Ginny’s entrance into the fic and my coming to Hogwarts. I wonder what house I’ll be in...”

Foria tuned out Lexi as she sat down at the table in front of her laptop. Sometimes it was just better to do what the characters wanted you to do; especially if Sirius Black, notorious prankster, was at your back.

Foria is not dead, and for the record, she does not own Harry Potter even if some of the characters were magically transported to her hall

closet. JK Rowling is the only one who can make money off of Harry Potter. Long Live JKR!

Chapter 16: Trouble Brewing at Hogwarts

The rest of the holidays dragged by at an excruciatingly slow pace for Harry and he was almost looking forward to being back at Hogwarts. Lexi hadn't spoken to him since Christmas night. She continued to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs, while he was alone in their room. The room was incredibly small; however, it seemed huge and lonely without Lexi in it.

Sirius wasn't much better than Lexi was. While he was his kind and cheerful self for the most part, it was quite obvious that the distance between the Potter children was affecting their godfather as well. Sirius did not take sides, but it was evident that he did not like that they were fighting. Sirius was closer to Lexi; nothing at this point could change that. So, when Lexi wanted to spend time alone with Sirius he did; thus cutting off most of Harry's access to his godfather.

The Dursleys for their part, kept their distance from Harry and Lexi at most times. Harry did magic and now they were fearful of both Harry and Lexi. That made Harry feel a bit smug and proud of himself. He might not be getting along with Lexi right now but at least things will be easier for her once he returned to school. The Dursleys couldn't be sure that Harry didn't share some of his magic "tricks" with Lexi before he left.

Each day Harry could barely contain himself with the excitement that he would be back at Hogwarts soon. It was almost funny that merely weeks earlier he couldn't wait to go back to Private Drive to be with Lexi. Harry knew he would feel bad once he went to school if Lexi was still mad at him. However, he didn't think he did anything wrong. She was the one that started this and he would be damned if he apologized to her for something that was her fault.

The Sunday Harry was to return to school was cold and dreary. It seemed that Mother Nature was in the same mood as Harry. On the return trip to Hogwarts, Harry and Remus didn't pretend to know each other. According to the older man, he wanted to make it seem like he

and Harry never made contact. Harry guessed that Remus wanted to have plausible deniability about Sirius if he were to get caught.

Harry could understand why his father's friend would want to do that, but it would have been nice to have someone to talk to on the long ride to Kings Cross Station. Once at the train station Harry quickly made it on to Platform Nine and three quarters before Remus apparated away to do whatever he usually did.

Harry immediately began scanning the crowd for his good friend, Hermione. Harry hadn't spoken to Hermione since the Christmas dinner at the home since Hermione went out of town during the rest of their holiday to visit family. However, they set up their plan for meeting each other on the return train from home. Now all Harry had to do was follow Hermione's plan.

Unfortunately, there were just too many people around the platform for Harry to spot his bushy haired friend. Actually, the only people Harry recognized were several students from Slytherin including the always annoying Draco Malfoy. Harry steered clear of the area where Draco and his lackeys were crowded around adult versions of themselves.

Deciding that he had a better chance of Hermione finding him, Harry went on the train to find a compartment for them to share. One thing that Harry had noticed was that the train had seemed a bit smaller than usual. Harry idly wondered if he was just losing it or if there really were just less compartments on the train.

Finding an empty compartment near the end of the train, Harry stowed his carry-on baggage before taking a seat waiting for Hermione. Boy did he have a lot of things to share with her.

After waiting for only a few minutes his bushy haired friend walked through the compartment door.

"Oh Harry!" Hermione cried upon seeing her friend. "I'm so glad to find you. I've just got loads to tell you."

Harry gave Hermione a wary smile since he knew her news had to be good while his wasn't so good.

"Is everything alright?" Hermione asked as her smile slipped off her face. "Did something happen? Are Lexi and Padfoot alright?"

Harry didn't even have to say anything and Hermione already knew something bad had happened. Was he that easy to read? Or did the bushy-haired witch just know him that well? In any case Harry knew that he had to tell his friend all about the things that had happened since Christmas.

~*~

Hermione stared at Harry in complete shock. This was all her fault! Harry and Lexi were so close and she knew that Harry loved his little sister more than anything else in the world. Now they were no longer speaking to each other and it was all because of her.

"I am so sorry, Harry," Hermione said with a strained voice while blinking her eyes trying to keep her tears from spilling.

"Why in the world would you say that?" Harry asked the sullen Hermione. His confusion was evident on his face.

"Well, it's entirely my fault!" Hermione wailed. "Lexi and you are fighting because of me. If I wasn't in the picture then everything would be just fine between the two of you."

Harry was nervously running his hand through his already messy hair. Hermione idly wondered where he picked up that behavior considering she had never seen him do anything like that in the past.

"This had nothing to do with you," Harry eventually said before putting up a hand to stop Hermione's protests. "I don't think anything could have prevented this. Lexi and I have never been apart before. We just need to work out the changes that are occurring in our lives."

"But without me-" Hermione began before Harry quickly cut her off.

“I would be miserable and friendless,” Harry supplied. “I’m glad I’ve got you Hermione.”

Any further conversation the two first years were about to have was interrupted by someone knocking on their compartment door. Before either of the students could respond the door slid up to reveal another boy and a girl. Both of these students seemed a bit older than Harry and Hermione and if Hermione had to guess she would say they were in their third or fourth year. The girl had long dark hair that was slightly wavy and the brightest blue eyes she had ever seen. The boy on the other hand had blond hair and hazel eyes. The patches on their chests revealed that these students were from Slytherin house.

“I’m sorry to bother you,” the girl said in a very polite tone, “but we seem to have been kicked out of our compartment by some really rude upper classmen. Do you mind if we sit with you?”

“No, not at all,” Harry said before Hermione had a chance to reply. It was obvious he wanted to change the subject of their conversation and the arrival of these two other students gave him the perfect opportunity. Hermione, however, had a feeling that something bad was going to happen due to the arrival of the other students.

The two Sytherins enter the compartment and stowed away their traveling bags in the racks above the seats. They then sat down on the bench opposite from Harry and Hermione. The two groups of students just began to stare at one another. Neither group breaking the silence that had settled over the compartment. Finally, Hermione couldn’t take it anymore. If she was unable to talk to Harry about what was bothering her she would at least be able to make friendly conversation.

“ So, I’m Hermione Granger,” Hermione began breaking the uncomfortable silence, “and this is my friend Harry,” she continued while gesturing towards Harry. “Who are you?”

“Oh, sorry,” the boy said a bit sheepishly. “I’m usually not this rude. My name is Karl and this is my friend Amanda.”

“Please call me Mandy,” Amanda replied with a very pretty smile on her face. “The only one who calls me Amanda is the prat over there,” she said gesturing towards Karl while rolling her eyes.

“I’m not a prat!” Karl indignantly yelled and Hermione broke out into laugh with Harry and Mandy.

Perhaps this train ride wasn’t going to be as bad as she feared.

~*~

Harry had to admit, this ride to Hogwarts was a lot better than his first. He had Hermione there to talk to and keep him company. Allowing him to forget about his problems with Lexi, and now there was his new friends Mandy and Karl.

They were both third-year Slytherins but they didn’t act like any of the Slytherins he had the privilege of meeting so far since he went to Hogwarts. Were all the first year Slytherins just a bunch of spoiled brats who were used to always getting things their way?

Both Karl and Mandy were like the anti-Slytherin as far as Harry could tell. For crying out loud, Mandy was a muggleborn and Karl was a half-blood. If you actually paid attention when Draco Malfoy was running his mouth you would have assumed that all Slytherins were purebloods. These two third years were definitely breaking all of Harry’s preconceived notions about the house of snakes.

It was actually refreshing to meet some other students who didn’t seem to care about who he was and who took his mind off his ‘Lexi problem’ as Harry was beginning to think of it.

“Then my little brother asked mum to let him levitate the angel on to the top of the Christmas tree,” Karl said as he was in the middle of telling another funny story about his younger brother Chris. However, the ending of this story would have to wait as their compartment door was rudely thrown open.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t Potty, the Mudblood and the Slytherin Terrible Duo,” the snide voice of Draco Malfoy swept through the compartment. Harry couldn’t help but roll his eyes. Did Draco really get his kicks by tormenting Harry and his friends?

“Malfoy,” Karl replied a bit wearily.

“What do you want twerp?” Mandy asked while concentrating on her nails as if they were more interesting than Draco. The effect on the Malfoy heir was to have him turn several shades of red.

Apparently this kind of confrontation was normal for Harry’s new friends.

“Listen here, you filthy mudblood whore,” Draco said while pulling out his wand. His hands were shaking in anger. “You really need to learn your place in this world.”

“Stop this right now, Draco,” Hermione said while jumping to her feet. “Just leave us alone.”

“I’m a Malfoy,” Draco replied turning his attention away from Mandy and towards Hermione. “I can do whatever I want. I think it’s time for you to learn your proper place in the wizarding world.”

Before Harry could respond to the threat to Hermione a loud crack was heard as a blue light shot from the end of Mandy’s wand. Harry hadn’t even seen the witch pull it out of her robes. The spell had impacted Malfoy on his upper left shoulder and to Harry’s amusement the blonde boy was starting to break out in boils all over his body.

“I think that maybe it’s you who needs to learn their proper place,” Mandy said while twirling her wand trying to sound unconcerned to Draco’s cries of surprise. “Blood and money mean nothing when you don’t have the power to back it up.”

Without responding to Mandy’s words Draco ran out of the compartment. Harry hoped they wouldn’t be running into him again until they were safely in the confines of the castle.

“You’re going to get in so much trouble,” Hermione immediately said as the door closed. She kept wringing her hands with her anxiety. “Were his words really worth hexing him over?”

Harry noticed that both Mandy and Karl had incredulous looks on their faces and Harry almost wondered where his new friends learned that hex since it certainly wasn’t on the Hogwarts curriculum.

“Listen,” Mandy said leaning close to Harry and Hermione. “In Slytherin, it’s eat or be eaten. Things like that happen all the time. I’m not going to get in trouble since Malfoy will never want to admit that I hexed him that badly, since I’m just a mudblood.”

“I hope he has a compartment alone,” Karl said with a bit of a snigger on his face.

“Why is that?” Harry asked.

“Well it about ten minutes those boils are going to pop and boy will that be a mess!” Mandy replied with laughter clear in her eyes. “If he is with other people, he won’t be very popular since they will all be quite a mess.”

“Where in the world did you learn something like that?” Hermione asked hesitantly.

A large grin covered Mandy’s face as she gave her simple reply, “You’d be surprised at what you can find in the Hogwarts library when you are properly motivated.”

~*~

Audrey Turner was a very intelligent girl. She was considered one of the top students in her year at Hogwarts, even though she was sorted in to Gryffindor rather than the studious Ravenclaw. Audrey was very open to the students of all the different houses and in fact had several close friends who resided outside Gryffindor tower. She liked to think

that a combination of her intelligence and her ability to cross house lines made her the fifth year female Gryffindor prefect of her year.

Prefects had a very important role within the school system. They were the enforcers of the rules and regulations that held the foundations of the school together, not to mention they were supposed to assist the first year students become adjusted to life at Hogwarts. The teaching staff could not be at all places at all times, therefore, students acting on their behalf were readily needed.

When Audrey received her prefect badge with her Hogwarts letter over the summer, she had dreams and ambitions of befriending all the first years and helping them with whatever they needed. Audrey wanted to be the person they came to for help with school work, or if they were having issues with other students in other houses. More than being a prefect for power, Audrey wanted to be a prefect who was a mentor.

Yet, her dreams and ambitions came crashing around her. That pompous git Percy Weasley was assigned the male fifth year position for Gryffindor, and Audrey knew she would be fighting an uphill battle. That redheaded moron had an ego that was larger than Gryffindor tower. During their first introduction to the first years Audrey didn't even get a word in to introduce herself to the first years at large.

While most students at Hogwarts were preoccupied with the Boy-Who-Lived, Audrey was not. She could clearly see during his first meal at the castle, that he was lonely and a bit shy in his new surroundings. Audrey felt the best thing she could do for him, was to leave him alone to give him a bit of a reprieve from the stares.

The only first year Audrey was able to make an impression on was a boy who was too distracted to follow the group. When she first approached him, she had no idea who he was. Yet once he said his name was Harry, she immediately sought out his scar to confirm her suspicion. The one student she was able to reach out to was the Boy-Who-Lived.

Audrey kept a firm smile on her face and led the boy to Gryffindor tower, never acting like he was someone special or different. Hoping a kind face would make his day.

It seemed to have as it quickly became routine for Harry and another first year student, Hermione Granger to sit with her at meals and come to Audrey whenever they had a general question about a class, Hogwarts itself, or the wizarding world in general. Audrey had realized that while Percy Weasley was a prat with a rod crammed up his backside, who rarely let Audrey handle any issues in the tower, she had achieved her goal. To those two students, Audrey was a mentor and perhaps a confidant.

However, just a few days into the second term of school Audrey began doubting her success with being a good prefect. Apparently some students, most likely those hooligans the Weasley twins had been pranking Harry on and off during the first term of school. Professor McGonagall only became aware of the situation after Professor Burbage mentioned it to her over Christmas recess. Apparently Professor Burbage was aware Harry was being bullied but she didn't know who the bullies were. Professor McGonagall had noticed Audrey's friendship with Harry and asked the fifth year prefect to keep an eye on the celebrity.

Audrey was embarrassed and outraged that Harry didn't bring this situation to her attention. She had told the boy repetitively that if he ever needed anything or had any problems that all he had to do was come to her. Yet, that never happened in this situation.

There was only one thing that Audrey could do in this situation, approach Harry about it. And that was what Audrey would do.

"Hey, Harry," Audrey said as she approached Harry who was sitting alone at a study table in the Gryffindor Common Room. "How was your holiday?"

"Alright, I guess," the bashful Gryffindor replied as he refused to meet eye contact with the old witch. "How about yours?"

“Great!” Audrey said in a peppy tone. She wanted Harry to be comfortable during their talk, however, the poor boy looked miserable.

“So, Harry, something has come to Professor McGonagall’s attention,” Audrey began going for the straight forward approach. She felt he would appreciate that more than having her beat around the bush for Merlin knew how long. “It seems that you were a victim of several pranks over the course of last term. Why didn’t you tell me about it?”

“I’m sorry, Audrey,” Harry replied after a few moments. When he finally looked up at Audrey and she saw his cheeks turn bright red with embarrassment. “I just didn’t think it was very serious. Someone was just messing around with me I guess.”

“Harry, even if someone wasn’t doing it to be mean, per say you have the right to not be pranked if you don’t like it.” Audrey stated looking Harry directly in the eyes. “According to what I heard some of those pranks involved some very advanced spells. I doubt they were pulled by another first year. Do you know who did this?”

Harry simply shook his head no, and Audrey was a bit disappointed. She would have loved to fry whoever it was that was giving the young wizard a hard time.

“If you don’t know who did it,” Audrey continued, “how do you know it wasn’t serious? I mean it might start out seeming like an innocent prank, but it could have the possibility to escalate to something more serious.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry replied not meeting Audrey’s eyes again.

“It’s alright, Harry,” Audrey said placing a hand on his forearm in an attempt to comfort him. “I know Hogwarts and magic are a bit new to you still. It’s an adjustment to get used to living here, but even if this prankster didn’t mean to hurt you they could have by screwing up their prank. Will you tell me if it continues?”

“Sure,” Harry said as if his heart wasn’t in it. Something was definitely wrong.

“Well, I’ll see you later,” Audrey said as she bade Harry farewell. One thing was certain. Audrey was going to have to keep a better eye on Harry Potter. Something very wrong was going on with him.

~*~

Harry was pissed. Ever since they returned from term, Hermione seemed a bit distant. At first Harry thought it was because she still blamed herself for the rift that was growing between Harry and Lexi. However, after constantly telling his bushy haired friend that she was not the reason for their disagreement, Hermione stopped claiming that it was her fault.

But she was still distant with him. It was like there was an imaginary wall that suddenly shot up in between them. Harry tried to figure out what was preoccupying his friend, but for the life of him he couldn’t figure it out. Perhaps she was just busy with getting back to term? But that didn’t mesh because she was always concerned about her school work.

He was really at wits end, even though it had been less than a week since they got back to Hogwarts, he was still rather concerned. Lexi was ignoring him so the only one he had left was Hermione.

When Audrey told Harry about someone tell McGonagall about those pranks, a chill had run down Harry’s spine. Did Hermione tell McGonagall even though she knew Harry didn’t want her to know? It could explain her distance but Harry was reluctant to think his friend would betray his trust.

Entering the library, Harry knew exactly where to find his bushy haired friend. She was sitting at her usual table with a mountain of books surrounding her. Even for Hermione the number of books that she had around her seemed excessive.

Well, there was no time like the present.

“Hermione,” Harry said from behind the witch, startling her.

“Oh Merlin, Harry! You gave me such a fright,” Hermione replied while picking up the paper that flew out of her hand when Harry had spoken. “What brings you here?”

“Audrey spoke to me in the common room this afternoon,” Harry began while watching Hermione carefully to see how she reacted to his words. “Someone told McGonagall about the pranks.”

The only expression that crossed Hermione’s face was confusion, which was the look Harry had been hoping for. He really didn’t want to not trust Hermione.

“Who do you think told her?” Hermione asked while absently nibbling on the end of her quill.

“I don’t know,” Harry truthfully replied. “The only person I could think of that might tell her was you.”

“Me?” Hermione asked with an incredulous look on her face.

“Well, I knew you didn’t like the way those Slytherin students had acted and I thought perhaps you would want McGonagall to know in case the prankster continued to target me,” Harry explained. He didn’t feel it was necessary to keep things from Hermione. She needed to know why he thought she might have been the one who told the professor.

“Oh,” was Hermione’s simple reply as she turned her attention back on the books and scrolls in front of her.

“So, what are you working on?” Harry asked, really wanting to know what his friend had been so intently working on.

“Oh, not much really,” Hermione distractedly replied. “I was just looking into something that Mandy had said on the train.”

“What’s that?”

“Well, she said basically said you could find just about anything so long as you were properly motivated,” the bushy-haired witch continued. “So, I’m trying to use the library to find a defense for Legilimency. It has bothered you on several different occasions then so there must be a defense or a cure for it.”

“So this is what you have been doing in the library since the beginning of term?” Harry asked betting there was something more to what Hermione was doing.

“Oh, of course not!” the bushy haired witch exclaimed. “I’ve also been looking into more advance charms and transfiguration spells. I find those to areas of study very fascinating.”

“Thanks, Hermione,” Harry said while grabbing the book closest to him and started to comb the pages. While he could spend the time trying to figure out who told about the pranks, it was better to do something more productive. Hermione was right; it was a good idea to learn more. It didn’t hurt to increase his spell arsenal.

“Umm, Hermione?” Harry began trying to gain his friend’s attention once again.

“Yes, Harry,” Hermione absently replied while skimming the pages of the book in front of her.

“Perhaps you are taking too much on at once,” Harry stated while waiting for his bushy-haired friend to give him her full attention. “What I mean is maybe you should focus on one project at a time,” Harry further explained at Hermione’s questioning look.

“I’m not sure I’m following,” Hermione said with a bit of a frown.

“I’ve barely been able to see you this week because you have been so busy,” Harry carefully began. “It’s just I miss my friend. I would

love to help you with your different research projects. Maybe instead of holing yourself in the library you can ask me for help and we can do it together?”

A smile slowly crossed Hermione’s face. “That sounds like a good idea, Harry.”

~*~

Friday potion classes with the Slytherins were the bane of every Gryffindor’s existence, even for star Gryffindor pupil, Hermione Granger.

This Friday’s lesson, the first of the term, was far worse than any other class that Hermione had been subjected to date. For some reason Professor Snape had gotten it in his head that it would be a good idea of the students to cross partner across house boundaries. In short the Gryffindors and Slytherins were being forced to work together while mixing potentially dangerous ingredients. To Hermione, this idea just screamed hazardous work environment.

Most of the time the Gryffindors would work on one side of the room while the Slytherins would work on the other side, this rarely resulted in major fights, injuries or explosions. Occasionally, two or more Slytherins would feel like instigating something so they would purposely sit on the Gryffindor side of the room. Thus they were surrounded by potential targets to cause mayhem and danger with. Every time the Slytherins did this one or more Gryffindor would be sent to visit the hospital wing due to injuries, Neville often being the favorite target.

But for this class Hermione actually was in fear for most of her classmates, Gryffindor and Slytherin alike. Snape was not just torturing them, he was trying to kill them.

Luckily for Hermione she was able to quickly pair up with Tracey Davis at the beginning stages of the class. The half-blood witch was a lot more moderate than many of her fellow Slytherins and in terms of trying to cause injuries to the Gryffindors she was downright conservative, never once sabotaging or injuring a Gryffindor.

Unfortunately for Harry and Neville, they were not as fortunate as Hermione was. Neville was working with Blaise Zabini, who had 'accidentally' caused Neville to need the services of Madam Pomfrey. Harry, on the other hand got the king of the little snakes himself, Draco Malfoy. Snape actually paired them together himself, like he couldn't see how volatile that situation could potentially become.

But for the most part Hermione had a relatively easy class. Tracey barely said two words to her, and not a one of them had been an insult. Also, their potion was currently at the correct color and consistency as it should be for their current stage in the brewing process. Yes, things were going rather well.

"You're not what I suspected," Tracey said suddenly breaking the near silence that the pair had been working in.

"Oh?" Hermione inquired while stirring the pickled newt eyes.

"You don't seem nearly menacing enough to successfully trade hexes seven Slytherin upper-classmen in a running battle across the castle grounds," Tracey said as if she was commenting on the weather.

Hermione dropped the silver spoon she was using to stir the cauldron. "Excuse me?"

"You should really hear the rumors about you and your boyfriend, Harry," Tracey said with a slight smile on her face. "I might be afraid of your left hook if I believed any of them."

Hermione's brain promptly crashed at that moment. After approximately fifteen seconds it rebooted it's self.

"Wait, there is a rumor that I have a mean left hook?" Hermione asked while trying to process everything the Slytherin witch had surprised her with.

"Yes," Tracey said with a smile on her face, "and I'm not joking."

“Drat,” Hermione replied. “I was hoping. Why in the world would someone make something like that up about me?”

“Oh, there are lots of reasons,” Tracey replied while cutting their dandelion roots. “I mostly believe it’s because you are just as much an unknown as Potter is.” At Hermione’s blank look, Tracey put down her knife and turned to face the bushy-haired witch.

“Listen Hermione,” Tracey continued as kindly as she could, “I don’t mean any disrespect but as a muggleborn witch you are an unknown to most of the school. About seventy-five percent of the school either knows each other or of one another due to the small close-knit nature of the wizarding world. If you don’t know someone, someone you do probably does.”

“Harry Potter is a character in a fairy tale to most of the world,” Tracey further explained. “To Death Eaters he is the villain but to families of the light he is seen as a hero. When Harry showed up he did not live up to the expectations of anyone.” Hermione blush with embarrassment as she remembered how Harry did not meet her expectations initially either.

“To this day most of us still don’t know anything about him. So the rumors were created, probably based on real events, to give us some insight into him,” the normally quiet Slytherin stated. “And due to your proximity to Harry stories were started about you as well.”

Hermione knew she must have appeared rather hilarious with her mouth open and her gaping like a fish, but she couldn’t stop. She had wondered in the past if Harry needed someone to be in control of his image to the majority of Hogwarts, like a publicist. But she never thought it would be a necessity as it was eventually becoming clear to Hermione it was.

“Why are you telling me this?” Hermione asked suddenly wondering if the other girl was merely messing with her.

“You sat with my cousin Karl on the Hogwarts Express on the way back to term from the holidays,” Tracey said. “He told me a bit about how cool and normal you and Harry are. That the two of you are nothing like the rumors suggest. It’s too bad we’re in different houses. Otherwise I think we would make great friends.”

~*~

Albus Dumbledore serenely sucked on the lemon confection candy in his mouth. To the people gathered in his office he looked completely calm and in control. But on the inside the elderly school Headmaster was seething.

How in the world could all his careful planning go to hell in a hand basket?

“So why is the third floor corridor off limits?” Fudge pressed for what had to be the tenth time this evening. While Lucius Malfoy simply looked smug from the seat beside Minister Fudge.

“As I said before,” Dumbledore began, his patience was really beginning to wane, “Matters at Hogwarts are not the Ministry’s concern.”

“But see reason Headmaster,” Lucius said in his oily slick voice. “As a member of the Hogwarts Board of Governors, I was deeply shocked and appalled by what my young and innocent son Draco had to report when he came home from his first term at Hogwarts. I mean telling children if they enter a particular corridor of the school, they are risking their lives is just criminal.”

Dumbledore sighed to himself. He really hated all Malfoys. Thinking that they could out politically maneuver him, Albus Dumbledore was simply laughable. He had been play political games with the Ministry of Magic before Lucius was just a twinkle in his parents’ eyes. Now he was trying to figure out what was being kept guarded in the third floor corridor by using the Ministry to interfere in his plans.

“No children will be physically harmed if they entered the third floor corridor,” Dumbledore tried to explain his view point as carefully as he could. “I merely said that as a means to deter students from poking their noses where they don’t belong.”

“But why don’t you want children in that particular corridor?” Fudge nosily asked.

Out of the corner of his eye Dumbledore was aware that Lucius had leaned in considerably to hear his response. Well the good thing was that former Death Eaters such as Lucius Malfoy had no idea as to what was being guarded in the third floor corridor. The bad news was it had to be the shade of Voldemort who attempted to steal the stone from vault seven-thirteen at Gringotts.

“There is a special project being conducted in that particular area of the castle,” Dumbledore said purposely misleading the other wizards but not exactly lying to them either. Unfortunately he was going to have to make one of the protections of the sorcerer’s stone known to hide the true nature of the closed off corridor. “One of the more dangerous things being stored in that area of the castle is a three-headed dog by the name of Fluffy.”

“Dear Merlin!” Fudge exclaimed. “Why in the world would a three-headed dog be allowed in a school full of children?”

“Oh, I assure you Fluffy is quite harmless,” Dumbledore fibbed. “But I think the sight of a giant three-headed dog would be rather alarming for most of the student population. If they knew where Fluffy was currently living they may be encouraged to wait to see the dog instead of doing the cautious thing and stay clear of the dog’s general location.”

“Yes, yes,” Fudge mumbled, “that makes a lot of sense.”

Dumbledore was very relieved that the minister seemed to be taking his word for what it was. That was why his next statement caught him completely off guard.

“Good thing we have the Dementors guarding the school. We can set up a ward to alert the Dementors if anyone tries to enter the room with the three-headed dog,” Fudge stated with a grin that showed he was quite proud of himself for thinking of this ‘security’ measure.

“Oh, I don’t think that is really necessary,” Dumbledore said in a dismissive tone.

“On the contrary,” Lucius began with a glint in his eyes that meant he was up to no good, “I agree with Minister Fudge. It is a real possibility that the likes of Sirius Black would break into this school. If he happened to come across a giant three-headed dog in the process who knows how much damage and death the convict would cause.”

Dumbledore couldn’t help the frown on his face. Even with the Dementors guarding the school, Lucius thought Black could break in. That was surprisingly comforting. Even though Albus had protested against the use of Dementors to guard school children he did think if Black came to Hogwarts the Dementors would catch them. Perhaps Lucius knew something Albus did not about Black. Maybe he knew what dark means Black used to sneak by the Dementors on his way out of Azkaban and perhaps Lucius knew whether or not Black could do something like that again.

“Alright,” Dumbledore regretfully agreed. “A ward can be put up around the third-floor corridor to alert the Dementors if anyone attempts to break-in to where the three-headed dog lives. However, I would need several individuals to be exempted from the ward. Those that are involved with the project,” Dumbledore said in response to Fudge’s confused look.

“Right, right,” Fudge stated as soon as he understood.

“I would like to be there when the warding takes place,” Lucius slickly jumped in. “It would do well to have a member of the Board of Govenors present at an occasion such as this. That way you won’t inadvertently keep us out of the loop again.”

Threat understood, Lucius, Albus thought to himself. You're going to keep meddling in my affairs as long as you have the power to do so.

"Well then," Fudge said while clapping his hands. "I'm glad we could all come to some sort of an agreement on this matter. Come on, Lucius, we should return to the Ministry. Madam Umbridge needs to debrief us as to the situation with the goblins."

"There is a situation with the goblins?" Dumbledore ask truly confused as to why this was the first he was hearing of this. Usually he knew most things before the Minister did. His personal spy network in the Ministry was very impressive.

"Oh, nothing too important," Lucius said in a really bored tone. "It seems Madam Undersecretary Umbride is convinced a goblin stole her wand the last time she was at Gringotts for official business."

"So far the investigation has turned up nothing," Fudge added. "It's like her wand grew legs and walked away. But dear Delores is so upset about her missing wand that she has worked herself into a state of panic. I do hope she comes up with something. I'm not sure what would happen if she did learn her wand walked itself away."

"Cornelius," Lucius said in a very brisk tone, "we have been through this before. Wands can't evolve and grow legs!"

"But they are so magical!" Fudge whined. "You never know what they could possibly do. Boy will you be red if it truly did grow legs!"

Dumbledore bade both men goodbye as they left by floo. As soon as they were out of sight Dumbledore started to massage his temples. He couldn't believe he had to deal with that bonehead as Minister for another two and a half years.

A/N: Well here's chapter 16! As I told several reviewers I would not allow myself to see the Half-Blood Prince movie until this chapter was done. So see ya next week, I've got a movie to catch. ;) Addition: Just saw the movie so I had to add more. Seriously, I liked Half-Blood Prince the least book wise but I was highly surprised by the movie.

What do you all think? To see my full thoughts on movie check out my blog whose web address you will find in my profile. My review will be up on Monday.

Much thanks to zephy for being the world's best beta and cheerleader. See? You didn't have to come find me and kick the crap out of me until I finished the chapter. Much thanks to Picky, nyladnam04, and mysteryman10000 for their words of encouragement to get going on this chapter. I am truly sorry about the delay in how long this chapter took to come out. For future reference, my personal website (address in profile) has a progress bar on it to let you know how far I have gotten on the next chapter. Hopefully this won't happen again.

Next Chapter: A Team is Like a Family

Disclaimer: I do not make money off this fic. The only thing I get from it is the reviews you all leave me. So don't just put me on your alerts or add me as a favorite. Drop me a review and let me know your opinion of this fic. It will make my day and get me to write faster! JKR owns Harry Potter but I guess you can credit my mind with the creation of Lexi, I'm not sure if that is a good thing or a bad thing sometimes...

Chapter 17: A Team is Like a Family

It was an average morning at the Gryffindor table, if there ever really was such a thing. It was the first week of February so no one seemed too concerned about exams or class projects on this given day. In fact most of the students were wrapped up in the latest gossip of who liked who and which students turned the walls of Professor Snape's classroom bright pink; popular opinion was the culprits were the Weasley twins. All and all it was an average morning in Hermione Granger's mind.

Like clockwork, the messenger owls arrived to deliver the morning post. Hedwig landed in front of Harry with an unopened letter addressed to Lexi attached to her leg. Sadly this seen had become a regular occurrence since the spring term began. Harry would write a letter to Lexi and a few days later Hedwig would come back holding the letter he sent.

"Perhaps she will answer the next one," Hermione said in what she hoped was a reassuring tone. Merlin knew she loved Harry and hated to see him so upset over this estrangement from Lexi but for the life of her, Hermione did not know what to do. It seemed as though her ever clever brain was finally letting her down in a situation that was over her head.

"Why should I bother again?" Harry grumpily snapped at Hermione. "It seems like everything I try is getting me nowhere. When I was with her, she ignored my presence. Now that I am at Hogwarts, she ignores my letters. What more can I do?"

Hermione sighed. She really had hoped Lexi would get over her anger and start talking to Harry sooner rather than later.

“Have you tired talking to Sirius about it?” Hermione asked in a near whisper. Knowing it wouldn’t be wise to have anyone over hear that particular name.

“No,” Harry admitted, “not since I came back to Hogwarts.”

“Well, write to him,” Hermione said in a no nonsense tone of voice. “The sooner you do and know Lexi is alright the better you’ll feel.”

“You’re right,” Harry replied as a look of determination crossed his face. “I’m going to go write Padfoot a letter right now.” With those final words Harry left the Gryffindor table and headed straight out of the Great Hall.

“Is everything alright with Harry?” a meek voice startled Hermione. As she turned around, she realized it belonged to Neville Longbottom.

“I think everything is going to work out just fine,” Hermione simply stated with a glowing smile on her face.

If Lexi wouldn’t answer Harry’s letters, perhaps she would be willing to answer one written by Hermione. With a game plan firmly in mind the bushy haired witch pushed herself off the Gryffindor bench and walked out of the Great Hall, mentally composing her own letter to write.

~*~

Oliver Wood used his position as Keeper to survey his team’s progress since the beginning of term. Frankly, he was surprised at the changes in his team since before the holidays. While not many people would have noticed any differences, a good captain, such as Oliver, was more than aware of the altered environment around his team.

Last term the Gryffindor Quidditch team was on fire. Harry seemed to be unbeatable when catching the Snitch. If Oliver didn't know any better he would have sworn that Harry had a sixth sense to pin point the location of the Snitch at any given time. Fred and George had been particularly vicious when aiming Bludgers at Harry during practice which honed the Seeker's reflexes. Not to mention the girls were a well oiled Chaser squad.

However, since they came back from the Christmas holidays everything seemed a bit off. Harry seemed to be a bit distracted at all times. Appearances by the Snitch he would have easily sense last term seemed to elude him now. The Weasley twins were almost using kid gloves where Harry was concerned and barely seemed to send the Bludger towards their Seeker. And the girls just weren't in sync with one another. No matter how hard the ladies tried they just couldn't seem to get their timing to be up to par.

After the girls dropped the Quaffle for the sixth time in the last hour and a half Oliver had seen enough. He blew his whistle to have the team land. On an impulse he waved Potter's friend Hermione Granger down to the field from where she was talking to Madam Hooch. Once everyone was gathered together, all eyes were focused solely on Oliver.

"Alright team," Oliver began as he looked upon the team before him, "Can any of you tell me why I called you all down?"

His only responses were a few half-hearted shrugs and the occasional shake of the head.

"I want to know what happened to my team," Oliver simply stated as he crossed his arms over his chest. "We only have less than three weeks till our game against Hufflepuff and you all look like a bunch of flying buffoons." He may have been exaggerating a bit but it was bound to get his point across.

"What do you mean-"

"Ollie, Old pal-"

“Old Chap!” The Weasley twins voiced for the rest of the team. It suddenly occurred to Oliver that he needed a way to be able to differentiate one twin from another. Life was simply too confusing not to be able to tell those two apart.

“What I am talking about,” Oliver began purposely ignoring the twins’ nickname for him, “is that you two have pulled the kid gloves out.”

“No, we haven’t!” Fred, Oliver guessed, denied.

“Really,” Oliver challenged, “then why were you trying to practically kill our seeker last term with the viciousness of your attacks, whereas this term you are barely hitting the ball into his path?”

Both twins immediately turned bright red and quickly turned their gazes away from Oliver as they found other things interesting. Obviously what Oliver had understood as necessary preparatory work for a rookie seeker was done with some darker motive behind it.

“For the love of Merlin!” Oliver yelled making little Katie Bell jump. “We are a team. Can anyone tell me what that means?”

Nobody said a word. All of the Gryffindor Quidditch players were looking awkwardly at the sky or ground. The only person’s gaze who held his own was Hermione Granger.

“A team is like a family,” Oliver finally said breaking the uneasy silence that fell over the group. “We share our blood, sweat and tears with one another. Every person needs to do their part, their best, in order for us to win. One way you can look at it is that we are only as good as our weakest player. We need to help one another to grow in order to be the best team that we can be and we can’t be intentionally detrimental to one another.”

“Any problems between team members need to be dealt with off the pitch,” Oliver continued while making eye contact with one twin than the other. “I’m not saying that we all need to be hugs and kisses with

one another. No one is expecting us all to sit at meals together and share with one another our darkest secrets. But we've got to watch out for one another."

"I saw this from you all last term," Oliver plowed on since he had everyone's undivided attention. "Remember when Angelina distracted Snape from giving Fred and George a detention for during our first match? Or when Harry and Hermione backed Alicia up so that she wasn't 'accidently' injured by the Slytherins?"

"Yeah!" Alicia yelled breaking into Oliver's pep talk. But he was all for having other members of the team weigh in their opinions. "I shudder to think what could have happened to me if Harry and Hermione didn't come down that corridor when they did. They were absolutely fearless when addressing those greasy gits. We need to come together because we are each other's biggest supporters."

"Angelina," Alicia continued addressing her fellow chaser, "I'm sorry I got so mad at you. I know it wasn't your fault that the guy who I liked asked you out instead. Can we put it behind us and continue to move forward as if our fight never happened?"

"Of course!" the usually stoic Angelina said wrapping her arms around Alicia in a large hug. "I've missed having you around these past few weeks."

"Alright," Oliver said clapping his hands together and bringing everyone's attention back on him. "I'm glad we're beginning to see where there was some tension in the past few weeks. But I just want to say one more thing to all of you. If any one of you are having any kind of problems such as having trouble with class work, friends, family, or any other personal matter, I am here for you."

"If you need someone to talk to my door is always open to each and every one of you as your captain and friend," Oliver persisted making sure he locked eyes with Harry, whom Oliver suspected was troubled by something. "Alright, now why don't you all hit the showers for today. We'll practice again on Wednesday night."

With some muttered words of thanks the Gryffindor Quidditch team began to go their separate ways to pick up their training materials and to do exactly what their captain had suggested.

“Hermione, can I speak to you for a second?” Oliver asked before the bushy-haired witch walked away. A plan forming in his mind on how the first year could be of some assistance to the team.

“Umm, sure Oliver,” Hermione said in a slightly nervous voice.

“I just wanted you to know I consider you a member of this team,” Oliver began placing a hand on Hermione’s shoulder trying to calm the nervous girl down. “You are here at every practice rain or shine just like the rest of the team. Also, I hear we would have no Seeker if it wasn’t for you.”

“I’m not sure what you mean,” Hermione said as Oliver let out a chuckle.

“Madam Hooch told me you were the one who brought Harry’s situation to her attention,” Oliver explained. “Not to mention you probably saved Harry’s life during the first match with your excellent levitating charm.”

“That wasn’t just me,” Hermione said as she turned bright red. “Neville saved Harry’s life too.”

“As that may be,” Oliver continued when Hermione clamped down again, “I have a bit of a favor to ask you.”

“Umm, sure,” Hermione replied still blushing.

“I was wondering if you would be prepared to use your spell work to catch anyone in case they fall off their broom again,” Oliver asked before fully explaining. “I am planning on upping the intensity of the practices and it would be good to have someone on the side lines ready to act in case of an emergency.”

“It would be my pleasure,” Hermione replied with a half-smile on her face. “I wonder if there is a spell to create something like a safety net to catch someone if they fall from large heights. Or perhaps something that could soften the ground so they basically bounce if they hit the ground. Oh, I’m going to have to make a trip to the library tonight to research possible safety spells after my flying lesson with Harry,” the bushy-haired witch mumbled as she began to walk away and join Harry farther down the pitch.

Oliver was a bit shocked with intensity Hermione embraced the role he wanted her to take with the team. He figured if she was going to watch the practices, she might as well have something productive to do at them. But from what he just heard she was going to go up and beyond his expectations for her. Not that he was complaining or anything.

Now all Oliver had to do was corner the Weasley twins and get them to spill their guts. He had no idea what the twins had against Harry but purposely being mean to the boy was no way for an experienced team member to act toward a rookie.

~*~

Working on homework was quickly becoming Harry’s number one means to distract him from thinking about his situation with Lexi. Harry desperately hoped his message would be received well by Sirius but Harry just wasn’t sure anymore. Now that Harry was a Hogwarts would Sirius begin to take Lexi’s side in the argument?

Harry’s internal struggle was cut short by the sound of someone clearing their voice. Slowly turning around Harry saw Percy Weasley standing behind him. His cheeks were bright red with either anger or embarrassment, Harry couldn’t tell which.

“Mr. Potter,” Percy began in a very formal tone of voice, “Our Head of House, the Deputy Headmistress Professor McGonagall needs to see her in her offices immediately.”

A bit taken a back Harry quickly scanned his actions for the past few days to try and figure why he was being called to his head of house's office. As far as Harry was aware all of his assignments had been handed in on time and he had done nothing that would warrant any sort of punishment.

"What is this in regards to?" Harry asked the prefect wanting more information before he entered the situation.

"That will be explained when you get there," Percy huffed and to Harry's surprise he seemed to turn an even brighter shade of red. Deciding that going along with the prefect was his only option, Harry reluctantly followed Percy Weasley.

"Is there something wrong, Harry?" Audrey's voice stopped both Harry and Percy in their tracks.

"Professor McGonagall wants-" Harry began only to be cut off by the pompous Weasley.

"This matter is none of your concern, Audrey," Percy said in a very dismissive tone of voice as he turned his back on.

"Well it looks like a student that is in my care is scared out of his wits," Audrey continued completely ignoring Percy and his bad attitude. She turned her attention on Harry as she asked, "Harry, are you okay?"

"I-"

"Audrey!" Percy snapped as he spun around. At this point all the Gryffindors in the common room had their eyes solely focused on this exchange. "You are interfering with Professor McGonagall's orders. Leave us alone or suffer the consequences!"

Harry sent Audrey a pleading look. He did not want to be forced to go alone to McGonagall's office. He knew he didn't do anything wrong, so why was he being treated like a criminal.

“Harry, would you like me to accompany you?” Audrey asked as she placed herself between Harry and Percy.

“Yes,” Harry quickly replied before Percy could prevent him from saying anything else.

“You are going to be in so much trouble,” Percy began to rant as they left the common room. “Professor McGonagall will take your prefect badge for this!”

All throughout the short trip to Professor McGonagall’s office, Percy did not stop ranting and raving about how much trouble Audrey was going to be in. Harry was worried about the first person he turned to for help in the wizarding world. He didn’t want Audrey to get in trouble on his account. But just before they arrived, Audrey placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder and gave him a wink. With that Harry believed everything was going to work out.

“Mr. Weasley,” Professor McGonagall’s brisk tone broke through Harry’s thoughts. “What is the meaning of this? I asked just to see Mr. Potter.”

“I am so sorry, Professor,” Percy said in his best kiss up tone of voice. “I tried to tell Miss Turner not to accompany us but she would listen and she created a scene in the common room and left it in chaos. If that isn’t insubordination, I don’t know what is.”

“That’s not true!” Harry yelled before he could stop himself. “What happened in the common room was not Audrey’s fault and there was no chaos.”

“Is that so, Mr. Potter?” McGonagall said with a raised eyebrow. “Miss Turner, perhaps you should explain your own actions.”

“Certainly, Professor McGonagall,” Audrey said with an air of respect and authority. Harry had never seen anyone act as calm and collected when faced with potentially being in trouble. “I noticed Mr. Weasley scaring a first year out of their mind when he was attempting to escort them to your office. I stepped in to offer Mr. Potter some

comfort. I doubt you wanted him to be in a state of fear when he was delivered to your office. Mr. Weasley took offense to my attempt to reassure Mr. Potter and then proceeded to tell me that I was out-of-line and besmeared my reputation when I came along with Mr. Potter's expressed permission."

Harry couldn't help but nod his head in agreement to everything that Audrey had said. He wanted Professor McGonagall to know that Audrey was merely doing what she thought was right.

"I see," Professor McGonagall said not allowing her face or voice give away her thoughts. "Do you think you made the right decision, Miss Turner?"

"Yes, Professor," Audrey immediately replied.

"Why?" Professor McGonagall inquired.

"Because someone had to do it," Audrey said. "It could have been any first year being sent to you. Even if they were in trouble there is no reason to needlessly scare them out of their mind."

"Thank you for your honesty, Miss Turner," Professor McGonagall said. "Turner, Weasley you are both dismissed. Although, Mr. Weasley, I would like to see you in my office tomorrow morning before breakfast. I can understand why you are particularly emotional this evening but it should interfere with your duties as a prefect."

"Yes, Professor," Audrey and Percy said in near unison. Both shot the other a glare before they walked off together towards the common room.

"Now, Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall continued, "would you please follow me into my office there is a matter of importance we need to discuss."

"Certainly, Professor," Harry replied in his most dignified voice.

After taking a seat in the chair opposite Professor McGonagall's desk and waving off her offer of a biscuit, it seemed that they were ready to get down to business.

"There seems to have been a situation that occurred over the Christmas holiday that involved you," Professor McGonagall began and all that Harry could think about was the wand Lexi 'liberated' during their trip to Diagon Alley. "A student that was staying at the school for the entirety of the holiday found something that belonged to you."

"They then," Professor McGonagall's face tensed up as she seemed to search for the right word, "kept your property with the intention to return it before the end of holiday. Unfortunately, they neglected to do so."

"What did they take?" Harry asked since he was unaware of anything of his that was missing.

"A gift that was left for you in your dormitory," Professor McGonagall replied. "I do not support giving you such a possession to have while you are at Hogwarts. However, it is yours by right and by law."

"What is it?" Harry asked.

Instead of answering Professor McGonagall simply slid a package across her desk to Harry. Harry gingerly took the package that was wrapped in brown paper and tied with a simple ribbon. Attached to the package there was a note. Harry made to open the package but Professor McGonagall stopped him.

"Please wait to open that until you are in private," Professor McGonagall said while shaking her head. "If I don't see it, then I can't confiscate it."

"Umm, alright, Professor," Harry timidly replied before saying good bye to his head of house and walking back to his common room.

After walking down the corridor a short way, Harry stopped in alcove and opened the note that was attached to the package. He figured it wouldn't hurt to read the note before finding Hermione to open the gift with. The note merely read:

Your father left this in my possession before he died. Use it well.

~*~

For the sixth time, an owl refused to take the letter Hermione wrote for Lexi and Hermione was at her wit's end. She had tried on two separate occasions to send her letter to Lexi but it seemed that none of the owls wanted to take the letter. Sure she could attach the letter to the owls but they never left their perch. At first Hermione thought that she was doing something wrong. But owl after owl they would not respond. It wasn't like she could have been selecting defective owls or something like that.

Could these owls sense that Lexi didn't want to receive a letter from her, so they wouldn't even attempt to carry it? Well, if that was true then why did Hedwig take all those letters from Harry to Lexi?

As Hermione checked her watch she realized it was less than forty-five minutes to curfew. At that moment, she wished she had asked Harry if she could borrow his invisibility cloak. Boy had she been surprised when her friend showed up in the library with a package McGonagall had given to him containing an invisibility cloak. The fact that the cloak had been his father's made it insistently Harry's most prized possession, even more important to him than his Nimbus 2000.

"Are you having trouble, Hermione?" a quiet voice asked startling Hermione from her thoughts. Turning around Hermione saw Susan Bones from Hufflepuff was behind her.

"Sorry about that," Susan said in response to Hermione's hand clutched to her chest. "You must not have heard me enter the owlery."

“No, I didn’t,” Hermione agreed. “Sorry I’ve been a bit focused on a bit of a situation I find myself in.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Susan asked in true Hufflepuff fashion. Even though they barely knew each other from classes, Susan was willing to lend her a helping hand.

“Well, I’m not exactly sure what is wrong,” Hermione began hoping the girl knew more about owl mail than she did. “Every time I try to send my letter to a friend the owl never leaves its perch.”

“Is this person a muggle?” Susan innocently asked.

“No, why?” Hermione’s curiosity was getting the better of her.

“Oh, well most muggles can’t receive owl mail,” Susan simply said. “Your parents and siblings could because the Ministry places a ward on them so the owls would be able to find them. Otherwise, since they have no magic their location cannot be found by the owl.”

“Wow, you know a lot about this,” Hermione said with respect evident in her tone.

“It’s nothing,” Susan said as her face broke out in a blush. “My Auntie works for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. I would go to work with her occasionally when I was younger. I remember that was one of the more recent laws the Wizengamot passed as a part of the Muggleborns’ Equal Rights bill.”

“Really?” Hermione asked, “That is simply fascinating. What other laws were recently passed for equal rights for muggleborns?”

“There were quite a few,” Susan said dismissively. “I know you like to learn a lot but perhaps we should work on your current problem,” Susan said pointing to Hermione’s letter. “We could get together at a later date to discuss the other laws.”

“That would be excellent,” Hermione said perturbed that it seemed like Susan knew a bit about her while she knew nothing about Susan.

“Have you sent a letter to this person before?” Susan asked turning their conversation back to the matter at hand.

“I haven’t but a friend has,” Hermione replied.

“Did Harry use a particular owl?” Susan inquired.

“Yes, but how did you know it was Harry?”

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions,” Susan said breaking out into a blush.

“No, it’s alright,” Hermione said letting the red-head’s comment go.

“Well, if that’s the case than I believe there is a ward on this particular person regulating the mail they get,” Susan said. “Or the ward could be placed on the location instead of the person,” Susan mumbled. “Either way you probably need to use Harry’s owl to send that letter.”

“Thanks, Susan,” Hermione said as she collected her belongings in her school bag to get ready to leave. She waited patiently for Susan to send her letter before both girls left the owlery together.

“Susan, can I ask you something?” Hermione asked gathering all her courage to do so.

“Sure, Hermione,” the Hufflepuff said with a bit of a grin.

“What do the Hufflepuffs think of Harry?” Hermione knew immediately that her question had come out of left field for the other girl.

“Umm, why do you ask?” the other girl stammered.

“I’ve noticed a lot of untrue rumors and accusations spread about Harry and me,” Hermione said in a quiet voice. “I would like to learn what stories are being told and try to clear them up. Harry and I are just a couple of regular first years, but everyone seems to think there is something more to us.”

“But you killed a mountain troll!” Susan gushed. “No other first year could have done that, and Harry, he... he... he was the one who killed You-Know-Who. Everyone knows he’s a hero. You must be one too since you are his best friend.”

Hermione blushed at the other girl’s praise but she knew she had to do her part to set the record straight. Curfew be damned.

“We should probably have that chat,” Hermione said stopping in front of an empty classroom and motioning for Susan to join her. “I will answer all of the questions that I can.”

“Does Harry really have a pet Hungarian Horntail dragon?” Susan asked with wide eyes.

“Harry doesn’t have a pet dragon,” Hermione said in her no nonsense tone of voice. Honestly where did these rumors come from? Then again, Harry did recently acquire his father’s invisibility cloak. “As for the troll, I don’t think it died. We were just in the wrong place at the wrong time and were lucky enough to survive...”

~*~

“Why is Weasley shooting you evil glares?” Hermione inquired.

To most it would appear that the bushy-haired witch had her full attention focused on the Daily Prophet in front of her. But Harry was more than aware of the fact that his friend was scoping out all the action going on around the Great Hall in between articles.

“No bloody clue,” Harry said. Hedwig still hadn’t come back with a reply from Sirius and Harry was getting a little snappish as a result.

“Language, Harry,” Hermione scolded from behind the paper. “I thought he was being less hostile towards you near the end of the term?”

“I thought so too,” Harry replied while taking a swift glance in Ron’s direction. “He actually hasn’t been bad the last few weeks either.”

“What changed?” Hermione asked.

“Honestly, Hermione if I knew I would have done something to avoid it,” Harry snapped. “It’s not like I like people treating me like I’m some disgusting thing they need to avoid.”

“Sorry,” Hermione said while folding the paper back up and putting it on the table. “I know that, I was just wondering if I missed something. It’s not like I know what goes on in the boy’s dormitory or anything.”

Before Harry could reply the swarm of post owls came rushing through the Great Hall. Now nearly a week after Harry originally sent Hedwig the owl returned with a letter addressed to Harry. As Harry untied the letter that was addressed to him from Hedwig’s ankle, Hermione took the time to feed Hedwig some pieces of bacon from her plate.

“Is it from Padfoot?” Hermione asked.

They had decided to call Sirius, Padfoot while they were anywhere public. It hadn’t dawned on either of them before Harry sent his letter to Sirius that someone may want to overhear their conversations. However, since Neville seemed to have caught some of it that discussion they realized that they needed to be more careful in the future.

“Yes,” Harry said with relief. “It’s from Padfoot.” Immediately Hermione scooted closer on the bench to read the letter over Harry’s shoulder.

Dear Harry,

I'm sorry that I need to keep this short but quite frankly I didn't have much paper to write with. Let me clear something up immediately. I am your godfather. I love you no matter what. I will not be taking sides during this argument that you are having with your sister. However, I will make it known that I do not like how long it has been dragged out for. You two need to sit down and talk to each other face to face and get over whatever differences have recently come up between the two of you.

Just remember that she is your sister, the only sister you have. Even though differences may come up between you, you need to rise above them. Trust me when I say you need to cherish every moment with one another, and not let the petty things come between you. You would regret it if something tragic was to occur and you never had a chance to come to terms with your differences with sibling. I know this from personal experience.

Don't worry about Lexi too much while you are at school. I am keeping a close eye on her. I would never let anything happen to my godchildren if I have to power to stop it. Please write again soon and make sure you tell me more about your classes and your friends. Have any girls caught your fancy yet?

With love,

Padfoot

"Do you think I should send him the cloak?" Harry asked in a low voice.

While they had never directly said it, Harry believed they both shared the same feeling about that. The invisibility cloak would be more practical for Lexi and Sirius to have compared to Harry and Hermione. No matter how much Hermione wanted to use it to raid the restricted section of the library.

"Yes, I think you should," Hermione readily agreed. "But before you do, can I use Hedwig to send a letter of my own?"

“Of course,” Harry replied a bit startled. Hermione had never asked to borrow Hedwig before. But then again Hedwig had been pretty active acting as a carrier between Harry and Lexi in the past.

As soon as Harry gave his consent, Hermione pulled out a letter and attached it to the owl’s leg. “Thank you, Hedwig,” Hermione said while petting the owl’s head. When her hand left the owl’s head, Hedwig immediately took off to deliver her next letter.

“Wow, she didn’t even stick around for a few minutes,” Harry said a bit wistfully. “She used to do that all the time when I was writing Lexi.”

“I think Hedwig is a very smart owl,” Hermione replied her eyes still staring out the opening Hedwig departed from. Harry noticed a ghost of a smile on her face. “I’m quite sure she knew how important my letter was.”

~*~

Life was so boring.

Sirius wouldn’t teach her anything new until she could master her latest transfiguration. No matter how hard Lexi tried she couldn’t get her nose to turn into a pig’s snout. To tell the truth she was completely sick of playing around with her metamorphmagus abilities. She really wanted to just be able to change her entire appearance at will but Sirius wouldn’t let her try changing her whole face until she was able to change each individual facial feature to his pleasure.

When would she ever need to make her nose look like a pig’s snout?

Anyways she was done with her homework and she had read all of her library books. It really sucked that her class was only able to go to the school library once a week and that was her only opportunity to take out books. She still had two more days until she could take out three new books for this week.

Who would have thought that not having to do constant chores would have given her so much free time? Not that she was complaining or

anything like that. She'd much rather have too much free time than none at all. It wasn't like the Dursleys were even talking to her at this point anyways.

Lexi Potter was laying on her bed staring out her bedroom window. As soon as Harry left for Hogwarts she immediately changed her residence back to their small bedroom. While it seemed like a good idea to hurt Harry by ignoring him before he went to Hogwarts and refusing to let him say goodbye. Lexi never contemplated how much it would hurt her as well. At first she ignored the feeling. If she didn't feel it, it didn't exist. But the more time that passed the more it hurt and she realized that she made a horrible mistake by not saying goodbye.

But now it was too late. She wasn't going to be seeing her brother until June. She couldn't tell him how sorry she was. Well, she could write him a letter saying she was sorry but what if he was mad at her?

She decided against opening any letters from Harry since she was afraid of what they might say. What if Harry hated her for hurting his feelings? What if Harry was never going to come back to Privet Drive? What if he was going to live with Hermione from now on? What if she was replaced by Hermione Granger in Harry's life?

Lexi just couldn't face the truth if that was what one of those letters said. If she never got the letter than those things could never happen, right? So every time Hedwig would come with a letter for her, she would send the owl away.

Tears were threatening to spill from Lexi's eyes but she fought to hold them in. She wouldn't cry over this. Harry would come home in June and everything would be alright. She would apologize for being a jerk and he would apologize for not consulting her about whether or not they could trust Sirius' secret to Hermione. Everything would be alright.

Squawk!

Lexi jumped up when Hedwig made her presence in the room known. She didn't even see the bird enter the room. Wait a minute, how did

Hedwig enter the room? Her window was shut just a moment before. But when Lexi turned to check the window it was open, not closed like she originally thought. Perhaps her mind was playing tricks on her.

Approaching Hedwig as if she had something deadly attached to her talons, Lexi glanced at the envelope. Surprisingly, the letter was not written in the messy scrawl she generally associated with Harry. Instead it was written in a delicate feminine script. Who, besides Harry, would use Hedwig to send her a letter? Oh, no! What if something had happened to Harry?

Without hesitating Lexi ripped open the envelope to have a lengthy letter slip out.

Dear Lexi,

I know we have never corresponded in the past, but I feel now is as good a time as any to begin. My name is Hermione Granger and you may remember me from our shared Christmas dinner this past December. I had hoped we would become good friends after we met but I fear that we have not had the proper opportunity to really have a chance to get to know one another better. Hopefully by becoming pen pals we may be able to get to know one another better.

I do not mean to be rude, offensive or intrusive for that matter but I am very concerned about how you are holding up. Is everything alright at Privet Drive? Are the Dursleys treating you well? Is there anything you need that I can get for you?

Please know that I am just as concerned about you as Harry is. I know you probably don't want to hear about Harry but I know he is missing you sorely. I wish the two of you could find an opportunity to get together and talk through your differences. Please don't hate me for saying that but I hate seeing Harry so sad because he misses you. You know he loves you so much...

~*~

AN: There is chapter 17 for you. Like I said in the disclaimer, drop me a review. Tell me what you like or dislike about the fic, or perhaps tell me your favorite line or part. A big thank you to the best betas a girl can have to zephy and swanpride. Their words and advice are always important to me and the direction that this fic goes, so thank you again. The fight will be wrapped up soon, I promise.

Next Chapter: Miss Potter Goes to Hogwarts

Fate has a funny way of playing with us. I don't own Harry Potter, but I enjoy playing fate with the characters of the series.

Chapter 18: Miss Potter Goes to Hogwarts

It was a bitterly cold February afternoon, merely days before the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff Quidditch match and the Gryffindor team was on the pitch practicing for the match. Hermione had taken her job very seriously for the team and while the weather would usually make training difficult, it was no longer an issue. Even though the wind and drifting snow made things extremely cold the Gryffindor team was toasty warm. All because of a simple extreme warming charm Hermione had found in large book called *Extreme Quidditch* (Everything a person needs to know about Quidditch to the extreme).

Hermione's eyes swept the Quidditch pitch, watching the actions of the Gryffindor team as she quietly conversed with Madam Hooch. Hermione remembered the first few times when she watched a practice with Madam Hooch; neither woman knew what exactly to talk about. However, as time passed, Hermione and Madam Hooch began a friendship of sorts, based on their common interest.

It seemed that both women were huge Potter fans, although Madam Hooch would never admit it to the general population of Hogwarts.

"I'm truly amazed," Madam Hooch gushed to Hermione. "I am impressed with the improvement you have made in your flying since your first lesson last term."

"I can't take all the credit," Hermione replied, unable to keep the blush off her cheeks. "It was all because of Harry. If it wasn't for him, I probably would completely detest flying."

"So, you don't detest flying now?" Madam Hooch prompted.

"Yes," Hermione replied. "I simply prefer not flying." Madam Hooch let out a cackle of a laugh at Hermione's last statement.

“That Potter boy is a natural,” Madam Hooch replied wistfully. “But he is a natural who can explain the process of flying quite well. I wonder if he would be interested in teaching other people who have difficulty getting into the air.”

“You mean like a tutor?” Hermione asked her curiosity evident in her tone of voice.

“Exactly,” Madam Hooch replied with a grin. “Do you think Harry would be interested?”

“Um, yes I think so,” Hermione said while watching Harry make a steep dive on the field. “You’d have to ask him though.”

“Of course,” Madam Hooch replied while studying Harry’s performance. “I really hope Harry gets out of this funk soon,” Madam Hooch sighed. “I’d hate to see him not catch the Snitch because he was too preoccupied by something else. Perhaps I should have a word with the boy,” Madam Hooch mumbled to herself

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” Hermione quickly stated. “But I think things will be turning around for Harry very soon. I think he will be in top form for the match on Saturday.”

“You sure?” Madam Hooch replied turning her hawk-like eyes on Hermione.

“Yes,” Hermione said with more confidence than she felt. She really didn’t know if the Potter siblings relationship could be repaired by Saturday but she would be damned if she didn’t try.

After a few minutes of silence between the two witches, Hermione noticed Oliver Wood call out some instructions before flying over to where they were sitting.

“Hermione, can I have a word?” Oliver politely asked to Hermione’s surprise. It was still a bit unnerving to have the captain of the Quidditch team approach her when she wasn’t technically a member.

“Do you need me to do something for you?” Hermione asked as soon as she and Oliver were a good distance from Madam Hooch.

“I’m not really sure if you can help me,” Oliver replied not looking at her. Instead Oliver’s attention seemed to be focused on the team practice. “As you probably know something is bothering Harry.”

Hermione nodded her head in agreement, not wanting to say anything and possibly break Harry’s confidentiality. For the second time in less than ten minutes she was going to have to talk about Harry’s personal problems.

“I’m just concerned about him,” Oliver continued without pausing. “Do you know if there is anything I can do to help Harry out?”

Hermione bit her lip as she weighted what she wanted to say in her mind. As far as she was concerned, Oliver just won himself points by not demanding to know what Harry’s problem was. Instead she felt that he really was concerned for Harry the person by trying to lend his help.

“I’m sure Harry will appreciate the concern,” Hermione began after several moments of silence. “However, there is not much you can do for him at this point. Harry needs to work this out on his own.”

“Did you know about the immature pranks that were being played on Harry?” Oliver asked abruptly catching Hermione by surprise.

“Yes,” Hermione winced as she answered. It seemed that Oliver was not crazy about her not doing anything about the pranks. “But Harry didn’t want to make a big deal about them. So he just shrugged them off and made me promise not to tell anyone.”

“If I had known,” Oliver began and Hermione noticed his hands were clenching the rail in front of him very tightly, “I would have put a stop to it. You are a bunch of first years, it’s only natural for you not to know who was behind the pranking. We upperclassmen, on the other hand, are all too aware of who are the pranksters of our house.”

“Oh,” Hermione replied unsure as to what was the proper way to respond to such a statement.

“I know that Longbottom fellow handled the situation and put the twins in their place,” Oliver said to Hermione’s surprise. “The twins shouldn’t bother Harry again between Longbottom’s threats and mine. I can tell that Harry is used to handling things all on his own, however, next time something like this happens I would like you to at least try to talk him into coming to me or someone else that could help him out.”

“I will,” Hermione easily promised.

“Good,” Oliver said as he continued to scan the pitch. “Are you sure there isn’t anything I can do?”

“Actually,” Hermione reconsidered her previous position on Oliver’s offer of help, “could you give the team the Friday night off? I know it’s your last chance to practice before the match but I think it will be beneficial for everyone to rest and relax that night.”

Oliver seemed to consider Hermione’s request for a few minutes before finally responding, “Alright, if that’s what the team needs.”

“It is,” Hermione quickly agreed.

“Let’s go down to the pitch,” Oliver said while holding a hand out for Hermione. I’ve got a team announcement that you need to hear.”

~*~

“I can’t believe it!” Harry moaned for the hundredth time that evening. “Snape is going to ref the match. He’ll try to kill me and fix the game so Hufflepuff will win.”

“You don’t know that,” Hermione replied with her nose still stuck in the book in front of her.

“Come on, Hermione,” Harry continued to pester his friend. “You know that Snape hates me. You see how he treats me unfairly in class. What makes you think that he would act any different on the Quidditch pitch?”

Hermione finally looked up from her book and stared Harry straight in the eyes. “I understand what you are saying, Harry. However, did it occur to you that perhaps more is going on than we know?”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked slightly confused at what Hermione was getting at.

“It’s simple really,” Hermione began in what would soon become known as her ‘lecture’ voice. “Do you really think Madam Hooch would let Snape ref the match without a good reason for him to do so? Do you really think Madam Hooch, who respects you a lot, would let Snape throw the match? And don’t get me started about Professor McGonagall; she’s just mad about Quidditch. There is no way she would let Snape do something like that.”

“No,” Harry said after taking a few moments to ponder what the bushy-haired witch said. “I guess you’re right.”

“Exactly,” Hermione said with a smug smile on her face. After a few minutes of silence, Hermione broke it with a different Quidditch-related question. “So, since you don’t have any Quidditch practice the night before the game, do you want to do something together?”

“I guess,” Harry replied a bit confused. “Isn’t that what we usually do every night?”

“Well, um, I was thinking we could do something a bit different,” Hermione said not meeting Harry’s eyes.

“What kind of different?” Harry warily asked. It wasn’t like Hermione to try to keep something from him.

“I want it to be a surprise,” Hermione said in a small voice. “But it will be a good surprise.”

“Alright,” Harry agreed since he readily trusted his bushy-haired friend.

“Good,” Hermione replied with a true smile on her face. “Just one more thing...”

“What?” Harry asked when Hermione’s voice trailed off.

“Could I borrow your invisibility cloak on Friday?”

~*~

Lexi was beyond convinced that she was going to get in trouble. Not the kind of trouble she would get in if she accidentally ruined some of Aunt Petunia’s prize roses or perhaps forgot to hand in a homework assignment. No this trouble was going to be much, much worse.

Oh why did she let Hermione convince her and Sirius to do something so reckless?

It wasn’t long after Sirius arrived in her life, that Lexi realized he one of the most reckless, headstrong people that she had ever met. Knowing that, Lexi knew it was a risk to share Hermione’s letter with him but Lexi felt like she had to. If there was a chance she could see Harry before the end of term, then she had to take it. And Sirius being who he was, was all for it.

So when Hermione suggested that she come to Hogwarts to talk to Harry, Lexi just couldn’t refuse.

But now that she was in a tunnel under the school heading into a secret entrance of Hogwarts, Lexi was nothing but scared. What if she got caught? What was she supposed to say if she got caught?

Oh, don’t worry, my godfather the escaped deranged murderer Sirius Black, apparated me to the secret entrance he knew of that lead into Hogwarts. Oh, he’s waiting in the part of the tunnel near the

Hogsmead sweet shop, Honeydukes, so don't be afraid. He won't be setting off the Dementors who are patrolling the school anytime soon.

Yeah, that would go over good. But Hermione told her not to worry about anything. She would have everything under control and no one would know that she was in Hogwarts other than Hermione and Harry. It was hard for her to just openly trust someone, other than Harry. But since Harry completely trusted the witch, she was giving her a chance.

She was at the end of the tunnel now. There was nowhere to go but into Hogwarts. Taking a deep breath Lexi muttered the password that opened the passage to school, only to find... absolutely nothing.

Lexi slipped out of the passage with a frown on her face before it automatically closed behind her. She had written Hermione specific instructions on where the one-eyed witch was located (since that was the statue that the passageway lead to) however, she never had time to receive a response from Hermione saying that she would be there waiting for her. Crap, this was beginning to turn out exactly how she feared.

"Lexi!" a voice hissed before Lexi had the chance to work herself into a full blown panic.

Lexi cautiously looked around for the girl she knew to be the owner of that voice, yet she just couldn't seem to see Hermione anywhere.

"Hermione?" Lexi whispered as she took a few tentative steps towards the center of the corridor.

Before Lexi knew what hit her, she felt an invisible arm grab her and something going over her head. The next thing Lexi knew she was under a see through cloak of sorts, with Hermione's hand firmly clamped over her mouth. The older witch dragged her to the opposite side of the hall and pulled them firmly against the wall.

As soon after they were pressed against the wall, Hermione's hand still over Lexi's mouth, a pale man in dark robes swept into the corridor. He had stringy, greasy black hair and a hideous hooked

nose. Staring at his nose for a few seconds, Lexi idly wondered if that was what Sirius was trying to have her shift her nose into when he asked for the biggest, nastiest nose she could imagine.

“I know someone is here,” the man said in cruel drawl. “Show yourself and your punishment will not be that severe. You will only have detention for the rest of your natural life. I will let you enjoy your afterlife in peace.”

Hermione had begun inching the two of them silently away from the nasty man while he was speaking. Their backs were still pressed flat against the wall. Lexi couldn't believe that the man was blind enough not to actually see them, they were still merely feet away from him. Yet, the man began reaching out in front of himself as if he were trying to pull something away. He seemed to become angrier each time he came up with nothing.

After about three minutes of inching along, the two witches made it to an intersection between two corridors. Hermione pulled Lexi across the hall quickly and lead them down one of the other hallways. As soon as they were out of the man's vision, Hermione broke out into a run, surprising Lexi as she was dragged behind the older witch.

“Sorry, about that,” Hermione whispered after they turned down another corridor. “I don't know how Professor Snape sensed me, but he did. I walked past him near the Entrance Hall and he had been tailing me ever since. Considering I was under an invisibility cloak, I have no idea how he could have done that.”

“That was Professor Snape?” Lexi squeaked out her question.

“Oh yes,” Hermione said in a brisk business like tone. “That was Professor Severus Snape, Potions Master and Head of Slytherin House.”

“I don't think I like him very much,” Lexi replied.

“Don't worry,” Hermione said with a hint of her smile in her voice. “Nobody does.”

~*~

“Alright,” Hermione said once she closed the door to the classroom, “Harry should be here any minute.”

Lexi took in a deep breath as she knew this was her last chance to talk to Hermione alone. Sirius had talked to her several times since she received Hermione’s letter and Lexi was well aware that she owed Hermione an apology just as much as she owed one to Harry. There was no better time for Lexi to do so other than the present.

“Hermione,” Lexi began unable to meet the older girl’s eyes; “I’ve got to get something off of my chest. Can we talk for a few minutes?”

“Of course,” Hermione said in a cheerful voice, “what can I help you with, Lexi?”

Lexi took a few moments to gather her thoughts before she began. While she had mentally gone over this conversation with Hermione several times, she was still nervous.

“I think I need to explain something to you,” Lexi began finally meeting Hermione’s eyes. “I acted like a jerk when I first met you, while you have been nothing short of wonderful to me. You deserve better and I think you should also know why I’ve been a complete git.”

“Lexi, you don’t owe me anything,” Hermione quickly began before being cut off by Lexi.

“Yes, I do,” Lexi replied. Her conviction in her words was evident in her voice. “All my life it has always been Harry and me. We were each other’s only friends and family. We only loved each other and I was always sure nothing could ever become between us.”

“Then we found out everything we knew was a lie,” Lexi continued as she started to pace back and forth in front of Hermione. “We belonged to a world we knew nothing about and with that everything changed. Harry had to go to Hogwarts and I couldn’t be with him for

two years. When we first found out about Hogwarts, Harry didn't want to go. He didn't want to leave me behind, but I convinced him he had to go and learn the family business." Lexi and Hermione shared a smile with that last phrase.

"But after he left, I missed him so much," Lexi's voice started to get choked up. "I was all alone and I never realized how much I depended on my brother until he was gone. I was so happy when Harry got Hedwig. We were able to keep in touch even though we wouldn't see each other until the holidays. It felt like I was going to be alright especially after Sirius arrived, but I was a terrible sister."

"I think I disliked you from the first letter Harry wrote to me about you," Lexi said as her voice dropped down to barely more than a whisper. "You were at Hogwarts with Harry and were able to share everything that I wanted to share with my brother." Tears were openly running down Lexi's face at this point in time.

"I was afraid that you were going to take my place in Harry's life," Lexi continued unable to meet Hermione's gaze anymore. "Why would Harry need me? I was his stupid little sister that was too young to go to Hogwarts. He had Hermione Granger, one of the smartest witches in the first-year. I thought Harry wouldn't need me anymore and because of that I started this whole mess."

"I picked a fight with Harry about you and I only did that so he would stop trusting you," Lexi confessed. "When Harry told you about Sirius, I realized that he told you everything just like what he always did with me. I wanted him to stop being friends with you, so you wouldn't replace me. I shouldn't have, I know that now but it was the only thing I could think to do."

"I'm sorry," Lexi said once again looking at Hermione's face since her shameful confession was done. Now she was just waiting for what Hermione had to say about her actions.

"I forgive you, Lexi," Hermione said as she pulled the crying younger witch into a surprising hug. "Although I'm not sure if there is anything I

really need to forgive you for. I don't have any brothers or sisters but if our positions were changed, I may have reacted like you did."

"Harry loves you very much," Hermione continued trying to sooth the crying girl, "You have nothing to fear. Nobody will ever take your place in your brother's life." After Lexi cried out all of her tears, the two girls finally pulled away from one another.

"Are you feeling better?" Hermione asked, and Lexi nodded in response not really trusting herself to speak just yet. "I would really like it if you didn't consider me just Harry's friend. I would like to be considered your friend as well," the older witch said much to Lexi's surprise.

"I would like that," Lexi was able to reply without choking up.

"Good," Hermione said. "I will start writing you letters and send them with Hedwig."

"Poor, Hedwig," Lexi countered. "The poor girl won't know what hit her." Both witches cracked up with that remark and Lexi realized how easy it was to be with her new friend.

~*~

"That's a pig's snout!" Hermione cried out in amazement as Lexi showed her some of the transfiguration skills she had been practicing.

"Sirius said his cousin Nymphadora had been able to do that since she was eight," Lexi boasted, her voice sounding odd since the shape of her nose and mouth were altered due to the snout. "He was determined for me to learn that as well. I think he wants me to challenge her one day by seeing which one of us can make the most unique face."

"That is utterly fascinating!" Hermione said as she clapped her hands in applause. "Can Harry possibly be a metamorphmagus as well?"

“I’m not sure,” Lexi replied as she changed her face back to normal. “We never really had a chance to see if he could before the, well you know.”

“Oh, right,” Hermione said before they both paused due to the door of the classroom swinging open.

Just as they previously discussed, Lexi quickly covered herself with the invisibility cloak just in case it wasn’t Harry that stumbled upon the unused classroom that they were waiting in. But sure enough, Harry was the person that came through the door.

“Hermione?” Harry said questioningly as he walked into the room and Lexi suddenly felt very nervous again. “I thought I heard talking, you’re not here alone, are you?”

“No, Harry I’m not,” the busy-haired witch said as she looked over at Lexi’s covered form and winked. “But I’ll see you in a little bit. I think there are some things you need to work out without me being here.” With those final words Hermione swept out of the room, only pausing to pat Harry comfortingly on the shoulder before she left.

“Um, hello?” Harry said a bit nervously and Lexi knew she needed to show herself, regardless to how nervous she felt.

“Hi, Harry,” Lexi said as she removed the invisibility cloak. “I’m really sorry,” Lexi began as her voice started to choke up. But before the young witch could say anything more Harry had rushed at her and pulled her into a bone breaking hug.

“I’m sorry too,” Harry whispered into her ear as both children began to cry. They were not just tears of sorrow and regret. They were also tears of joy and acceptance.

No other words were immediately needed between the two siblings as they held on to each other as if their lives depended on it. Lexi realized that they had never fought before and now they had to muddle their way through making up. Since this was a new experience for the Potter siblings they would have to use it as a learning

experience, that's what Lexi's teacher always told her. But Lexi was sure of one thing that they just learned today, the only thing that was important was that they were family, no matter what and they would always have each other to rely on.

~*~

Albus was quite convinced that he was developing a migraine headache. It would be really bad if he was ill the next day, when Merlin knew what would happen on the Quidditch pitch. Since it appeared as though someone had attempted to kill Harry Potter during the previous match, Albus thought it was best if both he and Severus were diligently watching the next match.

That was why, with much vocal complaints from Professor McGonagall and Madam Hooch, he had Severus acting as referee at the match, and he himself would be sitting in the teacher's box. Hopefully his fears would be put to rest and nothing life threatening would occur this time. However, he was not about to take any chances when it came to Harry Potter.

But why oh why, did the ministry have to pick the night before the next Gryffindor match to be the time where they could add their precious wards to the third-floor corridor? Albus wondered as he tried to massage his temples.

At first Albus thought it wouldn't be too bad when just two people from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement came to ward the corridor to the Dementors' controls. But within five minutes both Cornelius Fudge and Lucius Malfoy were in attendance as well. The last person he wanted to know about what may be in the third-floor corridor was the former Death Eater, Lucius Malfoy.

All things considered it went better than expected. Nobody actually wanted to enter the room where the three-headed dog was so no one was aware of the trap door under his feet. Yet, Lucius was still suspicious and was trying to worm-out any information that he could about Fluffy's presence in the school.

Sighing as he took out one of his super sour lemon drops, Albus noticed something else he missed when first entering his office. The school's wards, which were monitored from his office, had been tripped. Walking over to the device in question, Albus began to examine the output results. It appeared that one of his students had made a surprise visit to Hogsmead this evening. Albus rubbed his eyes as he remembered back about his warning to the students about not leaving the school property due to the Dementors.

Fortunately for this student, Albus had neglected to mention the secret passageways in and out of the school to the warden from Azkaban who was in charge of the Dementors. He would have to go down to the passage way to speak to the student in question about how reckless and dangerous their actions were. However, before he could stand up from his chair, there was a soft ding, indicating that the person in question had already passed through the entrance to the secret tunnel again.

Apparently, the person in question was destined to get away with breaking the rules and a chat with the headmaster tonight. It wasn't like Albus had missed anything earth shattering by not investigating this breach in the school protocol.

~*~

"I really don't want to say goodbye," Harry admitted as he hugged Lexi one last time before she entered the tunnel out of the school.

"Me nether," Lexi replied. "I wish I could watch your match tomorrow. But something tells me someone will notice that I don't belong at Hermione's side." Harry merely nodded in agreement to his sister's statement.

"You'll catch the Snitch for me?" Lexi asked in an obvious attempt to stall and give herself a few more minutes with her brother, not that Harry minded.

"Of course," Harry instantly replied. "In fact I'll ask Madam Hooch, if I can keep it and give it to you."

“Really?” Lexi asked her excitement evident in her voice.

“Sure,” Harry replied nonchalantly. “I can’t make any promises because I don’t know if Madam Hooch will let me, but I’ll try.”

“Thanks, Harry,” Lexi leaned in and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. “You’ll write me immediately after the match and give me the play-by-play, right?”

“Yes, Lexi,” Harry promised.

“Good,” Lexi said with a nod. “I’ll see you later,” Lexi finally said when it was obvious she needed to go.

“See, you later,” Harry replied squeezing her arm one last time. “Make sure you give Padfoot the cloak.”

“Duh,” Lexi said with a silly grin on her face as she slipped out of sight.

“Harry, we need to hurry,” Hermione said as she suddenly appeared down the corridor. “Professor Snape must have been still patrolling this area. He’s on his way here.”

Harry knew just as well as Hermione that they would seem really guilty if they were found in front of the one-eyed witch. Actually, if Hermione’s theory on Snape being a Legilimens was true then they were screwed; Snape would know exactly what they had done.

As fast as they could, the two Gryffindors raced down the hallway and down a set of stairs, trying to get as far away from Snape as possible. Unfortunately, the set of stairs they were on moved while they were on them. Hogwarts was notorious for staircases that moved of their own free will. The stairs zigged and zagged and stretched until they bended into a weird angle.

“Harry,” Hermione started nervously, “Where does this staircase lead to?”

“No, idea,” Harry replied. “But I think we’re going to find out.”

“What?” Hermione asked a bit panicked but Harry couldn’t blame her. The stairs moving with them on it had unnerved him too. “Why can’t we just go back?”

“Well, Snape is back there,” Harry replied.

“Alright, forward it is,” Hermione readily replied. The two Gryffindors hurried up the rest of the stairs and entered the corridor, only to meet three of their classmates standing around a closed door that a whole lot of growling was coming from.

“Ronald, Dean, and Seamus!” Hermione cried going instantly into what Harry privately called her bossy tone of voice. “What are the three of you doing?”

“Um, what are you doing?” Ron challenged only to receive a raised eyebrow in response from Hermione. “Fine, Hagrid told me about his pet dog, Fluffy and we wanted to check him out.”

“Oh,” Hermione replied and Harry knew she was surprised. He had thought they were doing something wrong.

“Why didn’t you just go into the room?” Harry asked since he saw Dean trying to peer in the keyhole.

“Well, it’s locked,” Ron replied, his face turning bright red. “Besides I’m not sure that I want to be face to face with a giant three-headed dog.”

“Three-headed dog?” Hermione shrieked as all the boys covered their ears.

“Yeah,” Dean replied. “Why else would they make the third-floor corridor off limits?”

“Oh, Merlin,” Hermione cried. “We need to find the way out of here. We are out of bounds!”

“Duh,” Seamus said with a snicker.

“The staircase changed while we were on it,” Harry decided to explain. “We had no idea where it led to.”

“Why don’t you just go back the way you came from?” Ron challenged.

“Snape is that way,” Harry said pointing in the direction that they came from. “And I didn’t think he’ll be too understanding on why any of us are here.”

“By Merlin! If Snape catches you, Harry he’ll get you kicked out of the game,” Ron yelled. “Why didn’t you say something sooner? We’ve got to get you out of here. We can’t let Snape mess with the Quidditch game!”

“Let’s just get out of here,” Hermione said sneaking glances to see if Snape was going to jump out at them any moment.

“Right,” Ron said as he began to lead the group away from the room where the three-headed dog was.

Amazingly, the Gryffindor first years could work together when they had a common goal. Or was that a common enemy?

~*~

A breakfast before a Quidditch match and Harry never seemed to mix well. He always felt too nauseous to eat even though Hermione would be attempting to throw food down his throat. This morning was no different.

“Really, Harry, you need to eat something if you plan on being any use to the team,” Hermione began to lecture.

“She’s right, Harry,” Neville said while taking a seat across from the duo. “Eat up. You still have three more hours before the match begins.”

“Don’t you mean it’s only three more hours until Potter’s downfall, Longbottom?” the nasal drawl of Draco Malfoy rang through the air. “I just can’t wait to see how good Gryffindor is when there is a fair ref, like Professor Snape, instead of that broom harpy, Madam Hooch.”

“Shouldn’t you be kissing Snape’s butt somewhere where he can hear you do it?” Ron Weasley jumped into the conversation after walking up behind Draco.

“Shut up you stupid weasel!” Draco yelled as his ears turned bright red. Harry, Hermione and Neville couldn’t stop themselves from giggling at the pompous blonde’s reaction. “You will all be sorry when Gryffindor loses!” Draco proclaimed before he stomped away.

“How stupid was that?” Neville asked with a grin on his face.

“Yeah, tell me about it. Make him eat his words, Potter,” Ron said to Harry before walking away.

“What was that all about?” Neville asked a bit confused and Harry couldn’t help but agree with him. Even after the events from the night before, Harry couldn’t understand why Ron suddenly changed his attitude towards him. It’s not like someone would change their attitude toward him because of Quidditch.

“I’ll tell you all about it before the match,” Hermione promised before she turned her attention back on trying to get Harry to eat.

~*~

“Welcome, Hogwarts, to another exciting game of Quidditch,” Lee Jordan’s magically amplified voice rang through the stadium. “Today’s match will be between the Gryffindor lions and the Hufflepuff badgers.”

And with that RolandaHooch turned her attention away from the commentary. It was very unusual for her to be watching a match from the bleachers instead of overseeing it, but when Dumbledore asks you something, he doesn't have to say please.

"I'm so glad you're up here with me and Jordan," Minerva said from her left. "I swear I just may strangle that boy sometime if he commentates on the inappropriate things. I hope you'll prevent me from committing justifiable homicide."

Rolanda chuckled before responding, "Like you don't usually agree with that boy," and Rolanda was treated to seeing the transfiguration professor blush. "But we'll keep that our little secret."

"That all of us in this booth are supporting Gryffindor?" Minerva pressed. "I dare say Pomona would just about die if she learned a former Hufflepuff was rooting for Gryffindor."

"What can I say?" Rolanda shrugged off Minerva's slight jab. "I appreciate the talent of Potter men when it comes to flying. I'd never bet against one."

"Even with a bias referee like Severus?" Minerva asked with a pout on her face.

"Even with Severus as the ref," Rolanda confirmed. "Don't tell me you are still sore that Albus made him the ref?"

"Don't tell me you're not," Minerva replied after sneaking a side look at Jordan to ensure he was fixated with giving out the opening information about the match. "I noticed you joined me up here, instead of joining the Headmaster in the teachers' box."

"I guess I prefer to sit with someone else who will openly enjoy today's game," Rolanda replied. "I know that you volunteered for your job of overseeing the commentary due to the lack of enthusiasm for the sport of Quidditch that occurs in that box."

"Too true," Minerva agreed in the thick Scottish accent.

“And the Snitch as been released,” Jordan cried causing both women to turn the attention back down on the pitch before them. “Johnson has the Quaffle...”

“Dear Merlin, please prevent the Weasley twins from doing anything drastic during this match,” Minerva said barely loud enough for Rolanda to hear. “I admit that I am fond of those boys and I’m not convinced that Severus wouldn’t just kill them out on the pitch and pretend it was an accident.”

Rolanda couldn’t prevent herself from giggling at her cohort’s prayer.

“Oh, shush you!” Minerva said as she began to blush.

“Sorry, sorry,” Rolanda apologized as she tried to get her giggling out of control. “But you really don’t have anything to worry about. Wood told Potter to get the Snitch as fast as he could. I think it was his way to prevent the twins from aiming a Bludger at Severus if they don’t like his call. The faster Potter gets the Snitch the sooner the match will be over and the less likely Severus will make an unjust call.”

“I notice you think Severus will be unfair,” Minerva pointed out.

“He’s just so nasty all the time,” Rolanda replied. “I think he just likes making everyone else as miserable as he is. If that’s the case, then yeah, he’s bound to make some really bad calls.”

“Do you think Potter can end this match fast?” Minerva asked with a frown on her face as she studied the match in front of her. “I noticed he’s been a bit preoccupied in class. I hope his attention on the Quidditch pitch hasn’t been affected.”

Rolanda sighed to herself. So, Harry wasn’t just acting a bit different in the air. She hoped Hermione came through on whatever she was planning. Harry needed to get that Snitch to prevent possible bloodshed.

“I think Potter will do his best,” Rolanda replied to Minerva the most diplomatic answer she could come up with.

“And Snape has called an unjust foul on Gryffindor,” Jordan called out. “The Beaters are supposed to aim at the Chaser with the Quaffle.”

“JORDAN!” Minerva cried out. “That’s Professor Snape or Referee Snape.”

Rolanda snickered when she realized Minerva never corrected Jordan about the foul being unjust.

“Sorry, Professor,” Jordan replied and Rolanda wasn’t sure whether he was addressing Severus or Minerva. “By Merlin, what is Potter doing?”

Rolanda turned her eyes back to the pitch where it looked like Harry was going to run Severus off his boom. Severus kept blowing his whistle at Harry, yet the boy kept coming, closer and closer.

“Of all the things!” Minerva cried out. “I thought Potter would at least be able to keep his temper in check.”

But Rolanda saw the one thing that everyone else seemed to be missing with her hawk-like eyes. The Snitch was buzzing around Severus. Harry was merely doing his job the way his captain asked him to. Get the Snitch before anything bad could happen.

“Minerva,” Rolanda began, “If the Snitch is in play everyone, including the ref, is supposed to get out of the Seeker’s way. Please remember that in case Severus starts flipping out because of this.” She wasn’t telling Minerva a secret or anything, but she doubt that Severus was aware of that rule.

“You think he already spotted the Snitch?” Minerva asked in a giddy voice.

“I think we’re about to find out,” Rolanda replied at the same moment that Harry pumped his fist into the air, holding the Snitch. Whatever Hermione did the night before, made all the difference in the world.

“And Potter’s caught the Snitch!” Jordan cried out.

“That’s a school record,” Rolanda added for Jordan’s benefit. “The previous record was catching the Snitch after seven minutes and thirty-two seconds of play. It was held by his father, James Potter.”

“Oh, yes,” Minerva said with a huge smile on her face. “I remember that match. The Seeker ‘fell’ down a flight of stairs so James had to play Seeker instead of Chaser.” Minerva’s still held doubt over whether the Seeker fell and broke her leg. Popular opinion at the time was that she was pushed down the stairs, resulting in her broken leg.

“Looks like Potter will be in the record books again,” Rolanda continued trying to quickly bring Minerva away from that dangerous subject matter. Even nearly fifteen years later, Minerva didn’t want to let it go.

“That’s right, folks,” Jordan continued. “Potter broke the school record by catching the Snitch in four minutes and seventeen seconds. Looks like Gryffindor is an unstoppable force now that Potter is on the team.”

“Oh, by Merlin,” Minerva said with her smile slipping away from her face. “Is Severus yelling at Harry?”

“Looks like he’s trying to throw the catch out,” Rolanda said with distaste in her voice.

“But the catch was legal,” Minerva replied. “Just like you said earlier, Rolanda, Albus will put a stop to this.”

“I hope that you are right,” Rolanda said just before she got the shock of her life. Severus flipped around his broom!

“Are you kiddin’ me?” Minerva said trying to repress her laugh. “Did Severus just slip?”

The Potions Professor and part-time Quidditch ref was hanging upside down on his broom. His legs were still clutched around the broom and his hands were hanging on for dear life.

“Should we do something?” Minerva asked at a bit off a loss. Thankfully the broom started to float to the ground before either witch had to do anything. “Did Albus do that?” Minerva asked while scanning the teachers’ section for the headmaster.

“No,” Rolanda replied with a grin on her face, she knew exactly where Hermione was seated and could see the young witch had her wand pointed at the ref. “That was Miss Granger. Wood asked her to learn some safety charms in case they would be needed. He didn’t like almost losing his Seeker to death in the first match. Since Hermione did such a good job then, he asked her to keep up the good work.”

“Fifty points to Gryffindor for good teamwork,” Minerva said with a grin on her face. Rolanda couldn’t help but notice she was ignoring Jordan’s comments about Severus’s predicament. “Severus is not going to like being rescued by a first year Gryffindor.”

“Too bad for Severus,” was Rolanda’s only reply before she left to meet up with Severus on the pitch. Someone was going to have to act as the buffer between the Gryffindors and the Potions Master.

~*~

Tap tap tap

Lexi Potter was having an amazing dream where she was exploring the ins and outs of Hogwarts Castle with Harry and Hermione. There were so many corridors to explore and rooms that hadn’t been used

in years. Lexi bet that there were sections of the castle that hadn't been used in centuries and she wanted to find what secrets they held.

Tap tap tap

If only that blasted tapping noise would stop! With that thought, Lexi opened her eyes to find herself in the smallest bedroom in the Dursley household. Oh, how she hated waking up sometimes.

Tap tap tap

Okay, there was that annoying sound again. Scanning her small room she couldn't seem to locate the source of the noise. But it was real. It was what brought her out of her dream world. Getting out of bed and slipping on the pink robe Remus had given her for Christmas, Lexi began to inspect her bedroom further.

Tap tap tap

The window! Whatever was causing that noise was tapping on the window. That could only be one thing. Sure enough, as she through back the shade, there was Hedwig with a bundle attached to her leg.

Opening the window carefully so it wouldn't squeak, Lexi let the snowy owl into her bedroom. Hedwig fluttered around the room for a moment before landing on the back of the chair to her desk. Quickly Lexi relieved Hedwig of her burden, Lexi's first letter from Harry of the New Year.

Opening the package Lexi was shocked when a tiny golden winged ball darted out of the parchment wrapping that had trapped it on its journey to her. Harry won the match and sent her the Snitch just as he had promised!

Removing the rest of the package's contents Lexi was surprised to find not one, but two letters. Saving the one she was sure was from Hermione till later, Lexi opened the letter she was convinced was from her brother.

Lexi,

Good news! I won the Quidditch match. I caught the Snitch in four minutes and seventeen seconds. According to Madam Hooch, who kindly let me keep the record breaking Snitch for you, the previous record that I broke was held by our Dad...

~*~

A/N: Several things wrote themselves in this chapter and went in different directions than what I previously planned but I was really happy with where the characters took me. I hope this makes several people happy since the angst is over, and Ron is starting to shape up and show his true colors. You just don't mess with Quidditch in Ron Weasley's book if anyone is curious on why he had a temporary change of heart. Oh, and not to mention Lexi went to Hogwarts. Next chapter will have a bit of a time jump. The end of the year is coming soon!

Big thanks to zephy and swanpride my betas. They work well under pressure this chapter didn't get sent to them till 11:30pm Sunday night and they still turned it around for me to post it today. They deserve a round of applause. Also a big thank you to nyladnam04 and Picky for their assistance, their input makes this a better story. You guys rock! And everyone check out their stories. You can find them all on my Favorite Authors list. Also, I'm working my way through replying to all the reviews. I really enjoying reading all your comments and questions anout the story! Thanks for all the love!

Foria

Next Chapter: I'd Gladly Go to H.A.D.E.S. (Hermione's Annoyingly Daunting Exam Sessions)

Disclaimer: If you are reading this chapter instead of studying something more important, like perhaps defense, then Hermione will be very disappointed in you. And since I don't own Harry Potter, I can't be held responsible for what she does in retaliation.

Chapter 19: I'd Gladly Go to H.A.D.E.S. (Hermione's Annoyingly Daunting Exam Sessions)

After the second Gryffindor Quidditch match of the year, time at Hogwarts seemed to fly by at an unprecedented pace. One minute it was late February, and everyone was congratulating Harry and Hermione on their respective catches at the match. The next thing Harry knew it was nearly the Easter holidays. Initially Harry had planned to go home over the few days that consisted of the Easter vacation. Unfortunately, it seemed Harry's professors had an entirely different idea.

In nearly every single class, Harry had some project he needed to finish or some long essay he need to write, with the assistance of the Hogwarts' Library. Of course these assignments were not given till merely a few days before the holiday. Even if Harry wanted to rush through the assignments, there was no way he could physically get them all done before the Hogwarts Express left with the students returning to London.

On more than one occasion Harry had the distinct pleasure of being fortunate enough to listen to Draco Malfoy rub in the fact that 'prominent pureblood' wizards such as he did not have to stay at Hogwarts over the small break. They had their own libraries to use to research their essays. The only good thing Harry got out of Draco's ribbing was that Draco and the rest of his goons would be absent from the castle for a few days.

The worst part of all of this holiday mess was trying to explain to Sirius and Lexi that he would not be home during the break. Sirius seemed to understand Harry's need to go stay at school. Explaining in his return letter to Harry that while he was at Hogwarts he did tend to go home during this break, he knew most muggle-raised witches and wizards tended to stay at school.

And Lexi... well Harry knew she was more than disappointed that he had not returned home for a few days. She never directly said it, but then again she didn't need to. Things often went unsaid between two Potter siblings and distance did not detract from their unique ability to do so. Harry was just fortunate that it was less than two months until the end of term, when he would be going home to Lexi for a few months.

"Harry?" Hermione's tentative voice broke through Harry's train of thoughts. "Are you even listening to me?"

"Sorry, Hermione," Harry sheepishly apologized to his friend who was sitting opposite him at one of the tables in the Gryffindor common room. "Could you repeat that?"

"I asked if you heard from Lexi about how things at the Dursleys now that Dudley is home for the next two weeks," Hermione replied in an exasperated tone of voice.

"Um, no," Harry reluctantly replied. "She hasn't mentioned him and I really didn't want to bring it up. She would say something if he was really giving her a hard time."

Hermione studied Harry a few seconds, biting her bottom lip, before responding. "I sure hope you're right."

"Harry, Hermione, can we have a word?" the voice of Ron Weasley caught both Hermione and Harry off guard.

"Sure," Harry replied trying to act as natural as he could. "What's up?"

"Um, well, we," Ron began, gesturing to himself and Seamus and Dean, "were wondering if either of you heard of a certain person we're having a hard time researching for ourselves."

Harry could see Hermione's eyes light up with the challenge of trying to research something that had the three boys in front of them despite.

Well, Harry assumed they had to be despite since they had turned to him and Hermione for help.

“Who are you trying to find?” Hermione asked and Harry had a feeling that he and Hermione were going to be spending many days and nights in the library trying to find this particular person.

“The bloke’s name is Nicholas Flamel,” Seamus replied and immediately Hermione shot out of her chair.

“Stay right there!” Hermione replied as she hurried towards the girls’ staircase. “I think I just read something about him earlier this week.”

Harry, Ron, Dean and Seamus stayed exactly how Hermione had left them. While the bushy-haired witch was only gone for at most five minutes, Harry had to admit they were some of the most uncomfortable five minutes that he had spent. While, the four of them were on better terms as of late, it was still hard for Harry to just forgive and forget some of the things he overheard the three of them say about him.

Hermione came bouncing back into the common room holding the largest book Harry had ever seen. If he had to guess he would say the book weighted more than Lexi and quite possibly could be bigger than his little sister. Hermione lugged the book onto the table in a move that had Harry worried that she possibly blew out her shoulder. Without a word Hermione immediately flipped the book to its index and after a brief scan moved the pages rapidly till she reached the one she wanted.

“Here he is,” Hermione said a bit smugly. “I knew I read it recently. I took this book out for some light reading. I dare say he is mentioned quite a bit.”

“Light reading?” Dean muttered questioningly as the three boys followed Harry’s example and crowed over the page. Harry couldn’t help himself when he sent a glare Dean’s way. There was no need for him to be disrespectful to someone who was helping him.

“ No wonder we couldn’t find Flamel in Study of Recent Developments in Wizarding,” Ron began. “He’s not exactly recent if he’s six hundred and sixty-five!”

A shudder suddenly went down Harry’s spine. For better or for worse, Harry wasn’t exactly sure he wanted to know why these boys wanted to know who Nicholas Flamel was. Whatever the reason, Harry was pretty sure it wasn’t going to be good for him.

~*~

Sirius had been gone for two days and Lexi was at her wits end. Her godfather was working out the details with Remus Lupin about whether or not he should agree to the Goblins’ offer. Luckily for her, unluckily for the Dursleys, Sirius had left the wand with her. But seriously, she shouldn’t need it. Dudley Dursley had to be the biggest prick in the history of the universe. So what if she was younger and smaller than him? It didn’t give him an excuse to try to pick on her.

In her defense Dudley was well aware that Harry had performed magic on his father over the Christmas holiday. Heck, she had overheard Aunt Petunia warning him to leave them alone. It wasn’t her fault that he was unaware of the fact she could perform magic on him with just as much ease. Boy was Dudley red after she immobilized him in the hallway when he was making fun of her. If Aunt Petunia hadn’t stumbled upon Dudley’s immobile body she would have left the prat there for an appropriate amount of time for him to properly learn his lesson.

Actually she was most thankful to Hermione. Without the bushy-hair witch’s letters containing the proper wand movements and incantations of a few defensive spells she would have been completely defenseless. Sirius always thought he would be around to protect her. While Lexi would love to believe that to be true it was just impractical. Sirius couldn’t be with her twenty-four/seven. He had Harry to look out for as well as to avoid Ministry detection. He was doing the best that he could, but her godfather wasn’t Superman.

Hedwig, who was perched on the post of her bed, began to nudge her head. Whenever she was down and lonely, Hedwig was more

than willing to cheer her up. Biting the end of her pen, Lexi finally figured out the best way to conclude her letter to Hermione without making Harry and Hermione worry unnecessarily about her.

Thank you again, Hermione. Those first-year spells are simply amazing. If you stumble upon any other like it feel free to send them my way. Hee hee hee!

Oh, and don't forget! I'm counting on you and Harry to find me a spell to turn Dudley into a newt. Don't fret; the prick deserves it! I'm just not sure of Harry remembers that he promised me a spell that would do that before he went to Hogwarts. I am holding you both accountable if you don't find something to do the trick in the vast library that Hogwarts owns. I know you will find a way to do it. You can't deny it; we all know you can navigate the place in your sleep!

Well, I'm really looking forward to your next letter. Your advice on where to find more information on Queen Boudica for my report was a godsend. In case you were wondering, I got an A on that assignment.

Lots of love,

Lexi

~*~

"I must say, I was very impressed with the results of the essays most of you handed in," Professor McGonagall began, at the end of the second class after the Easter holiday, as she handed back the graded essays.

It was quite obvious that the transfiguration professor was sending a glare that the corner where Ron Weasley and his friends sat. Hermione couldn't help but notice the embarrassed looks that crossed the three boys' faces upon hearing McGonagall's statement. She didn't need to be a seer to know that they had not done particularly well on the last assignment.

“It would do a lot of you well to take a page out of Miss Granger’s book,” Professor McGonagall continued to Hermione’s horror. “I must say in all my thirty years of teaching at Hogwarts I have not found a first year student who has produced such fine essays and practical work. If I didn’t know better I would swear Miss Granger was writing some of her essays for the O.W.L.s.”

Hermione knew she was completely beet red at this point in time. Professor McGonagall never handed out praise like this, and to do it in front of the entire class was unexpected. Nobody would ever let her live it down that not only was she a brain, but she was a brain that Professor McGonagall liked.

“Please, I strongly urge you all to make your studies a priority,” Professor McGonagall said without missing a beat. Her eyes were sweeping the room of Ravenclaws and Gryffindors looking at each student for a moment before moving to the next. “Advancing to second year is not a right. If you do not have the proper grades, you will remain a first-year while the rest of your classmates will advance to second-year. Neither you, nor I want to see that happen.”

As if by cue the bell rang to announce the end of class. All the first-years quickly jumped out of their seats as they began to gather their belongings before moving to their next class.

“Misters, Finnigan, Thomas and Weasley, please come see me,” the transfiguration professor said with a stern look and Hermione was rather grateful that she wasn’t one of the aforementioned boys.

“Great job, Hermione,” Harry said flashing her, his brilliant smile as they walked towards their next class. “Your essay must have been awesome for McGonagall to praise it like that.”

“Um, thanks,” Hermione replied a bit bashfully. She knew that most of the other students like Weasley and his friends would be relentless in their teasing over her receiving praise like that from their head of house. “Oh, Harry, you are truly terrible,” Hermione said lightly smacking Harry’s arm, once all his words completely registered with the witch. “It’s Professor McGonagall.”

“Sorry, Hermione,” Harry said once again flashing her a smile but something told the witch that Harry wasn’t sorry in the least.

“Hermione?” a tentative voice questioned from behind the bushy-haired witch.

Harry and Hermione stopped in their tracks and turned around to be face with none other than Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil, Hermione’s roommates. Both Lavender and Parvati tended to act as though Hermione didn’t exist, even though they shared a room with the other witch. The three of them were just simply too different and really never had anything to talk with one another about.

Hermione could care less about what the latest fashion trends were or what the coolest new charm for curling your hair was. While the other two witches were unlikely to have ever completely read a book cover to cover that was not required for one of their classes.

“What can I help you with, Lavender?” Hermione finally asked after she realized she was gaping at them like an idiot for a few moments.

“We were wondering if, well...” Lavender trailed off while she nervously twirled a lock of her beautiful blonde hair. Hermione would never admit it but she was a bit envious with what beautiful hair her roommate had been gifted with. It was a lot nicer than the bushy, mouse brown hair Hermione was born with.

“What Lav, was trying to say is...” Parvati began before trailing off herself. It seemed that neither of her roommates knew what would be the best way to address Hermione. “Well, could-we-study-with-you?” Parvati eventually rushed out.

Hermione blinked as she tried to process her roommate’s words. “You want to study with me?”

Both of the other witches frantically nodded their heads. Hermione turned to Harry to see his reaction, but honestly that boy was no help.

She could see the telltale signs that he was trying desperately to contain his laughter.

“Why?” Hermione asked, her confusion at this whole situation was evident in her tone.

“Well, you heard McGonagall,” Lavender began, still twirling that perfect lock of hair. “We’ve got to study in order to pass, and well, we don’t really know how to do that.”

“You don’t know how to study!” Hermione’s jaw must have reached the floor after she shouted the other witch’s response.

“Well, it’s not like we’ve ever had exams before,” Parvati replied defensively. “I mean we were raised in magical households, so we were home-schooled. Lavender was taught the basics from her mom, while Padma and I had a private tutor. But we’ve never had year-end examination of all of our knowledge from the previous year before.”

“And since McGonagall said you’re really, really good with school,” Lavender continued for her friend, “We were hoping you would be willing to help us study. Show us the proper way to study for the different subjects, and such.

They never had exams either! Hermione could feel her breathing become more rushed and labored. She was definitely having a panic attack. What were their parents thinking? How did they expect them to survive the year without some knowledge as to how to prepare for an important exam?

Hermione felt, someone grab her arm and carefully guide her to a ledge in front of one of the many stain glass windows the castle was home to. Belatedly, Hermione realized it was Harry who guided her to a seat. Taking several deep breaths, Hermione gathered control over her emotions.

“This travesty must be corrected,” Hermione said to the small group of Gryffindors and Ravenclaws that had gathered around her. “How have you prepared for the exams we’ve had throughout the year?”

“We kinda winged it,” Parvati said a bit sheepishly. “But that really hasn’t worked out too well for us.”

“Alright,” Hermione said standing up and pacing in front of the group before her. “We’re going to have to review each subject. Professor McGonagall was fortunate in when she gave her general warning to class, since I was about to start my exam revisions next week. Therefore, we shall start this week with a slightly larger study group than I had originally planned.”

“Can we invite a few more people we know that would benefit from your help?” Parvati asked in an innocent tone.

“Yes,” Hermione absentmindedly replied as she continued to pace. “Anyone who needs help will be more than welcome to join my study group. We’ll have to wait till we figure out how many people are joining the group before we can come up with the best method of sharing knowledge and resources. Harry,” Hermione barked.

“Yes, Hermione?” Harry replied from somewhere to her left.

“What time should Quidditch practice be over with tonight?” Hermione asked even though she most likely knew the response. In her haze of finding out the tragic flaw of a magical pre-Hogwarts education, Hermione did not trust herself to think clearly.

“Just before dinner,” was Harry fast reply.

“Then anyone who wants to be in my study group should meet me at the library at seven o’clock,” Hermione said surveying her roommates. “We’ll come up with a permanent schedule once we all meet. Is that good for you?”

“Yes, Hermione!” The two girls replied with a salute before the warning bell rang informing them they merely had a minute before the next class began.

“Let’s hurry,” the bushy-haired witch stated. “It wouldn’t do well to be late.”

~*~

“What in the name of Merlin’s soggy balls was that?” Neville asked with a truly terrified look on his face. He prayed to whatever magical power would listen that Harry knew what had come over Hermione.

“I think Hermione just found a cause to champion,” Harry said with a slightly disturbed look on his face. “I’d forget having any free time from here till the end of term. Hermione’s going to be having us study until our heads explode or we’re reciting potions recipes in our sleep, whichever comes first.”

“Oh, dear Merlin!” Neville exclaimed as he threw his head into his hands.

“You could have warned us,” Harry said turning to his shy friend. “You’re magic-raised; you could have possibly prevented this. How come you never told us you didn’t know how to study?”

“Um, in case you didn’t notice I tend to do all my class work with you and Hermione,” Neville said a bit defensively. “It wasn’t all that hard to pick up how to study. All I had to do was follow Hermione’s lead. Do you really think her exam sessions are going to be that bad?” Neville asked hopefully.

“Judging from her previous behavior...” Harry trailed as if weighing his words carefully. “May Merlin have mercy on us, for Hermione won’t.”

~*~

That night after a whirlwind Quidditch practice and a very fast dinner, since Hermione wanted to be in the library before anyone showed up for the exam session, Harry sat nervously waiting to see how everything was going to progress. Now don’t get him wrong. Harry

loved Hermione very, very much, but when it came to school work it was an understatement to say Hermione was a bit 'intense'.

"Oh, Harry," Hermione began fidgeting in her seat. Apparently, the bushy-haired witch was so excited about leading revision sessions that simply couldn't sit still for long periods of time. "How many people do you think will want to come?"

"Anyone with a brain will want to study with the smartest witch in our year," Harry instantly replied. "Come on Hermione, now that you gave a blank card for anyone to study with us I dare say you will have to beat some people back with a stick to get them to leave you alone."

Hermione's lips twitched slightly at Harry's statement. "Now, Harry," Hermione said in a slightly scolding tone of voice. "It's not nice to joke lightly about something important as examinations and studying."

"Sorry, Hermione," Harry replied, sending Hermione a salute similar to the one Lavender and Parvati had given the witch earlier in the day. That did it, seeing as Hermione burst into a series of giggles. "Sorry," Harry said again a bit sheepishly. "You were a bit too tense. You need to lighten up. There is nothing that you can do about all people who don't learn the proper way to study. All you can do is help those who ask for your assistance."

"I know!" Hermione said throwing her hands up in defeat. "But that doesn't mean that I don't wish that I could help everyone."

Suddenly a loud murmuring noise and the sound of several people moving caught both Harry and Hermione off guard. While no one was absolutely silent in the library, the request for quiet was respected by all students of all years. The loud noise was rather ominous as far as Harry was concerned.

Sure enough, an extremely large group of first years approached Harry and Hermione's table. At least, Harry took a measure of comfort in the fact that Hermione was gaping like a fish. It appeared as though the bushy-haired witch was not expecting such a large turnout.

Including Harry and Hermione, every Gryffindor first-year was present, as well as five people from Ravenclaw, including Parvati's twin sister Padma. As far as Harry could tell, every Hufflepuff had come along being lead by Susan Bones and her friend Hannah, whose last name Harry could not remember. And, most surprising of all was that two Slytherins had come along. Tracey Davis and Daphne Greengrass were standing a few feet away from the rest of the first-years, but Harry could clearly see they were meant to be a part of the group.

Doing a quick count Harry realized there were twenty-one people present which represented the vast majority of the first-year students. There was no way they could hold a study group this large in the library, despite what Hermione would want.

"Well, is this everyone?" Harry asked since Hermione still seemed a bit startled by the size of the group.

"Yes," Parvati quickly replied to Harry, her cheeks turning a bit pink. "We all want to learn how to properly study."

"Aren't some of you muggle-raised?" Harry asked since he knew for a fact that Dean Thomas was Muggleborn.

"Um, yeah," a boy from Hufflepuff replied. "While some of us did attend schools in the past, we are a bit nervous about studying for these year-end exams. So we want any pointers Hermione has to offer us."

"Alright," Harry said after a moment. Even though Hermione might be a bit surprised at the size of the group that wanted to learn to study by her, Harry wasn't. He held no illusions that any first-year would give their right arm to have Hermione Granger explain something they were having trouble with to them. Harry obviously wasn't the only person who noticed how smart his friend was. "Why don't we move to a better location now that everyone is present?"

"Why don't we hold these sessions here?" A Ravenclaw with a thick Scottish accent responded.

“I think these groups might get a bit too loud to be held here,” Harry replied. “If all twenty or so of us were talking at the same time we all might get banned from the library or something.”

After Harry said the joke, he knew he went a little too far. Every Ravenclaw, as well as Hermione had a look of horror and disbelief on their face. Sometimes, smart people just couldn't take a joke...

“Yes,” Hermione said now that she finally got a hold of herself. “I know the perfect place we can hold these study sessions. Let's go there and we'll set up a schedule for when we will meet and what we will study. Does that sound good?”

Harry surveyed the group noticed that everyone was willing to easily go along with just about anything Hermione suggested. In the eyes of their classmates, this was Hermione's party that they were just fortunate to be invited along for the ride.

~*~

It was definitely unnerving to have such a large group of her peers turn to her for help, but Hermione was committed to helping anyone that needed her help. When Lavender and Parvati asked if they could invite a few more people she was thinking two, possibly three others. But to have twenty-one people, including Harry, herself and Neville, well that was just a study group that was practically their whole graduating class!

While Hermione prided herself on her intellect, she wasn't oblivious to the fact that she didn't know everything. With as many people as who showed up there was a very high probability that some of the questions that were bound to come up would be well over her head. Hopefully, she would be able to come up with a solution to that little problem before she ran into any problems.

As everyone settled down in the classroom, Harry, Lexi and she used several months ago, Hermione realized that most of this was going to be winged. There simply was no other way for her to do this.

“Can I have everyone’s attention?” Hermione called out trying to get everyone to quiet down. Sure enough everyone did in a timely manner.

“Thank you,” Hermione said with a grin spreading across her face. “Now, we are all here today because we all want to pass our end of year exams. Some of us want to do more than pass; we want to ace these exams with outstandings across the board. While others of us merely want to find a sufficient way to study so that memorizing and learning all of the material we have covered will come easily to us. Regardless of our motives, we all are here to learn, and have fun while doing so.”

“What are Slytherins doing here?” the distinct voice of Ron Weasley rang through the room.

“I said anyone who wanted help was welcome to come,” Hermione instantly replied. “I do not care about what house anyone here is affiliated with. If you have a problem with people of other houses working together, then you can just leave and find someone else to help you.”

Unsurprisingly, Ron instantly dropped the matter and stayed with group.

“As I was saying,” Hermione continued pacing around the classroom in front of the chalkboard. “I want you all to achieve yourself imposed goals no matter how big or how small they may be in these sessions. Harry, what is your goal?”

“To ace potions,” Harry immediately replied without hesitation. Hermione had picked him knowing he would be willing to share for her. “In case some of the others in this room do not know, Professor Snape absolutely loathes me with an extreme passion. If I do outstanding level work, he will mark it as acceptable. So, I need to do outstanding work so that I pass potions.”

Hermione nodded to what Harry was saying even though she noticed several of their classmates giving him looks of dismay.

“Why does he hate you?” Susan blurted out, before looking highly embarrassed that she had done so.

“Well, it seems that Professor Snape had a lifelong grudge against my dad,” Harry explained the story she knew he got from Sirius. “They were in the same year at school together but in different houses, and had a bit of a feud that passed on to me, I guess.”

“That’s so unfair,” Lavender replied. Hermione suddenly realized that most of their classmates did even know the reason behind Professor Snape’s unfair treatment of Harry.

“Life isn’t fair,” Harry responded with a shrug.

Leave it to Harry to just shrug off something like that, Hermione thought while rolling her eyes. Not wanting to keep attention focused on Harry, especially since she knew he hated it, Hermione turned to the other side of the room. “Tracey, why are you here?”

“I need some help with Charms,” the Slytherin witch admitted. “It’s not my strongest subject. I apologize that I don’t have a more exciting reason but Professor Flitwick doesn’t have anything against my parents.” Tracey winked at Harry, letting him know she was joking as the rest of the study group began to giggle in response to her words.

“What about you, Padma?” Hermione asked moving on.

“I need to learn how to properly study for an exam,” Padma bashfully replied. “I heard there were several different methods to do so, and I admit I am interesting in learning how you do it, Hermione.”

“Oh, um, great!” Hermione responded enthusiastically. “Now, I was thinking we could meet Monday through Friday from seven till eight-thirty. At least until we get closer to the exams. During these hour and a half sessions we will cover a review of our different subjects as well as compare notes on what we found to be the easiest way to

remember certain bits of information we will most likely need to know for the exam.”

“I don’t feel comfortable leading all of these subjects,” Hermione admitted. “Just like everyone in this room, I, too, have room for improvement. I am no expert, so please don’t expect me to have all the knowledge or ability to teach you everything. This will all be a group effort. Therefore, in leading our discussions I would like to have different people be considered the leader or the expert in different subjects. Is there anyone who would like to volunteer to be our group expert in a particular subject?”

At first everyone was silent. Nobody apparently wanted to take any leadership. But it was impractical to think that Hermione had enough time to come up with review information for every subject. When would she have time to concentrate on her own work?

“I’ll cover Herbology,” Neville surprisingly offered and Hermione was ready to give the boy a hug.

“Count me in for Defense,” Harry offered and Hermione knew she owed him, since he probably really didn’t want to do it. Harry already knew Hermione turned to him for help with Defense Against the Dark Arts. So it was only natural that she would want him to cover that subject with their review group.

“What subject will you be covering, Hermione?” Tracey asked, startling the witch.

“Transfiguration,” Hermione replied. “It’s my strongest subject.”

“Then count me in for Potions,” Tracey replied. “We can’t have all the Gryffindors doing all the work.”

“I can do History of Magic,” Hannah Abbott from Hufflepuff meekly suggested. “It’s my strongest subject even if I’m not the top of the class in it. I’ve never fallen asleep in the lectures and I take great notes.”

“Grades don’t mean much,” Hermione replied realizing she should have explained her idea better. “You’re just going to lead our review discussion. If you don’t know the answer to a question someone has, then someone else in the room may know it. This whole thing is a group effort. But having all of the notes will be rather helpful for you.”

“I can do Charms,” Morag McDougal jumped in. “It’s always been my specialty.”

“Great,” Hermione said, glad that there were other people to lead the subject discussion groups. “When we meet together tomorrow we’ll go over several study techniques that I picked up over the years. Everybody is different so what works for me may not be the best fit for you. Also, I will go to our different Professors and ask them for review questions and practical practice. Any questions so far?”

No one seemed to question Hermione’s methods yet, to her thankfulness so she dismissed the group for the day. “We will meet again tomorrow, so see you at seven,” Hermione dismissed the group.

“Did you hear that Hagrid the Grounds Keeper hatched a dragon’s egg in his wooden hut?” Lavender gushed as the group began to break up and leave the room.

Out of the corner of Hermione’s eye she caught Ron, Dean and Seamus tense up at the subject matter. For some reason Ron kept rubbing a bandage that was wrapped around his arm. Were those boys starting false rumors for kicks?

“You mean that wooden shack that is close to the Quidditch pitch?” Padma asked. Hermione could only tell the Patil twins apart due to their school uniforms.

“ Yeah,” Parvati replied. “He hatched the egg, but Professor Dumbledore sent it to a dragon preserve in Romania since it would be hard to raise a dragon on school grounds.”

As soon as those words left Parvarti's mouth Hermione noticed that the three Gryffindor boys seemed to relax a bit; how particularly odd, but such awful rumors shouldn't be spread around school.

"Are you serious?" Hermione just couldn't help herself and butted in. "Do you really believe that story?"

"Well, Draco Malfoy told us that's how it happened," Lavender said a bit snippily. "He said he saw the dragon through one of the windows of Hagrid's hut."

With those words, the boys began a feverish whispered conversation. What in the world was going on?

"Don't believe half of what Draco Malfoy tells you," the cool collected voice of Tracey Davis cut into the conversation. "He is delusional at best. Draco routinely goes around the Slytherin common room telling everyone that You-Know-Who will be back one day, and when he comes back the Malfoy family will sit at his right hand." Tracey broke off with a laugh while Hermione and the three other girls stared at her.

"Honestly," Tracey said shaking her head in disbelief. "Everyone knows Harry Potter, you know, the guy whose going over defense with us, got rid of Voldemort. There is no coming back from dead. Draco lives in his own little delusional world. Just ignore what he tells, you. It's what most of the Slytherins do."

"Thanks, Tracey," Hermione said with a bit of a grin. She had to admit even mentioning the possibility that Voldemort may one day return was enough to make her skin tingle, and Hermione didn't even live through his reign of terror.

"Don't mention it," Tracey replied with a grin. "Oh, and Hermione, I'll ask Professor Snape for some exam practice work for potions. He tends to react better to Slytherins asking for things than people from other houses."

“Oh, great!” Hermione responded with a grin of her own. Truthfully, she had been a bit nervous about approaching Professor Snape. “See you tomorrow, Tracey!”

With that Hermione and Tracey departed from the room, leaving a buzzing Lavender, Parvati and Padma behind, not to mention the Gryffindor boys who seemed lost in their own world. Something told her the gossip around Draco Malfoy was only just beginning.

But at the same time Hermione made a mental note of who was at the hub of information and rumor spreading in the different houses in their year. It may come in handy if anything weird happened around Harry again.

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Hermione’s Anticipatorily Decisive

Examination Study Methods

A phrase that would later become the subject of nightmares for half the Hogwarts first-year class of 1991-1992, was the only thing written on the chalkboard to greet the members of Hermione’s study group. But was anything more really necessary since it spelled out Hermione’s plan as clearly as it could.

Harry had spent most of the previous evening reassuring Hermione that everything went extremely well at the session meeting the night before. However, Hermione continued to fret regardless of what he had said. Perhaps after a second successful night, things would be much better for his bushy-haired friend.

“Alright, can I please have your attention?” Hermione called out immediately gaining everyone’s attention. After her threat to throw Ron Weasley out the night before, nobody was going to go against anything Hermione said. If she wanted order, by Merlin she would get order.

“Tonight I am going to spend our time going through some basic studying techniques,” Hermione began surveying the group. “I have been informed that many of the magic-raised students here at Hogwarts were not taught proper studying techniques for various reasons. If you want to share these techniques with a friend who is not a part of our group please feel free to do so. Also, if you don’t want to be a member of our more long term study group, I will not feel offended. Like I said the night before, everyone is different. Perhaps studying in a group is not the right thing for you.”

“Getting back to the subject at hand,” Hermione continued, “As you can see from the board, what we will discuss tonight will be a series of anticipatory yet decisive methods to study from. For example, a subject that we studied for a month will be more likely to be on the year-end exam than something that we covered in just a day. Therefore, we will spend more time reviewing the month long topic.”

Harry started to drown out Hermione’s speech as he had heard it several times before as they prepared for subject exams. From gazing around the room, Harry could easily see that his bushy-haired friend had most of the students’ undivided attention focused on her. Good for them, they were bound to learn lots from Hermione.

~*~

While Harry turned his attention back on Hermione, in the corner of the opposite side of the room, Ron Weasley couldn’t focus any longer on her annoying ramblings. Looking to both sides, it was easy to see that Dean and Seamus were as equally lost as he was.

“Did anyone else notice that the initials of the first five words on the board spell out the word HADES?” Dean whispered to both Ron and Seamus. Both Ron and Seamus had to stifle back their laughter so not to draw attention to their group.

“Tell me about it,” Ron whined in a whisper of his own. “This is pure torture. I wouldn’t be surprised if we really were in HADES.”

“Well we are if you consider HADES to be Hermione’s Annoyingly Daunting Exam Sessions,” Seamus replied not missing a beat. That was part of the reason that Ron loved having Seamus around. He was really quick on his feet and could make just about anything humorous.

Unfortunately, due to Seamus’ remark the boys were unable to keep back all of their laughter. Luckily only the people immediately around them heard it. It wouldn’t be good if Granger kicked them out of her review group. If they didn’t ace the end of the year exams, the three of them were in jeopardy of failing.

“You should really have more respect,” Neville caught them off guard. Longbottom was sitting in front of Ron and from what he could see of his face, he looked really pissed. Ron could only imagine that Granger and Potter’s occasional tagalong had heard their remarks.

“Sorry, mate,” Ron tried to smooth over to no success.

“Listen here,” Neville said turning completely around in his chair to face Dean, Seamus and Ron. “If I were one of you I’d gladly go to HADES if it meant passing exams. You’re all lucky to be here and you all know that you need all the help you can get. Instead of studying for tests you all were playing games. Instead of completing assignments you were all arguing over whether Quidditch or Football is the best sport. Now you three are screwed so if I were you, I’d be praying that Athena over there,” indicating Hermione, “never hears what you have said and continues to want to help you pass your exams. Otherwise, you’re all on your own.”

Ron knew his face was turning completely red due to embarrassment. Neville was right. Ron was just lucky that McGonagall hadn’t owed his mum telling her how poorly he was currently doing in school. But that didn’t mean he had to like the other boy for putting him in his place.

~*~

Two weeks after Hermione's exam sessions began Professor McGonagall gave a surprise quiz to the dismay of many of the students in the class. It was the first test of how well the study group was doing. Hermione had no idea why everyone had panicking so, but then again she was eagerly awaiting their results. As long as they were participating and studying the material in their free time Hermione was confident that her fellow students knew their stuff. Perhaps they lacked confidence in the own skills?

"Misters Weasley, Thomas and Finnigan," Professor McGonagall called out startling the three boys in question. "Nice work," their professor began giving the boys a rare smile. "I can really see the improvement in your knowledge of the fundamentals of Transfiguration."

All three boys shared high-fives over their good marks on the quiz and Hermione couldn't help but share a smile with Neville and Harry. It looks like those boys had to go to HADES to get Transfiguration through their thick skulls.

While at first Hermione was highly offended at having her review sessions referred to as HADES, it was Neville that pointed out it made a rather good joke. In fact the usually shy boy even had an upperclassman make him a button that stating 'I'm proud to go to H.A.D.E.S.!' which he took to wearing to every review class. Now if only she could get the boys to stop referring her Athena. Teasing or not it was starting to get on her nerves.

~*~

In my profile there is a poll to see where you think Lexi will be when she goes to Hogwarts (remember that won't be till Harry's third year). I am interested in seeing what you all think at this point. This poll will not determine where she will go. That was decided the minute I dreamed her up.

~*~

A/N: Okay a huge thank you to everyone that reviewed. You guys are awesome you've got me and zephy going crazy with the amount of

love we get from you all (she reads all my reviews too). I haven't replied too many reviews yet simply because you could either have a reply or a new chapter. I will try to reply to them later.

A big thank you to my betas zephy and swanpride and a huge thank you, complete with a bow to nyladnam04 who came up with HADES as the nickname for Hermione's review group. Thank you again!

And HADES will have an important role in years to come, so keep your eye on it.

Foria

Next Chapter: Ron Weasley's Totally Awesome Adventure!

Disclaimer: Three-headed dogs do not make good pets, especially if you have small children. You can't hold me liable if something happens if you try to own one, since I do not own Harry Potter, JK Rowling does.

Chapter 20: Ron Weasley's Totally Awesome Adventure!

It was a lovely Wednesday afternoon when the last end of term exam was completed. They were free from essays and study sessions until their second year began. That was assuming that they had passed all of their exams, but as Hermione once put it, how could they not with the amount of time they put into it?

Several of the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff first years, including Harry and Hermione found themselves relaxing under a tree on the shore of the Black Lake, where they watched the giant squid play in the cool water. Unfortunately, not all of the first year students could simply relax now that the exams were done.

"So what did you put down for question twenty-nine a of the charms exam?" Hermione began to interrogate Ernie Macmillan. "I wasn't sure if I got all of the parts of-"

"Oh, Hermione," Neville finally snapped. "Give it a rest. The exams are over and done with. If you got anything less than an 'outstanding' I will personally go with you to find Professor Flitwick and have him go over whatever you missed."

"Really?" Hermione asked with her eyes lighting up. "Truly you will?"

"You have my word, Hermione," Neville said solemnly to the amusement of the rest of their group of friends. Harry noticed that Lavender, Parvati and Susan Bones seemed to have a very annoying case of the giggles at this point.

"I'll hold you to it," Hermione said while shooting Neville a shrewd look that promised of pain if he ever decided to go back on his word.

“So, what are you guys planning on doing this summer?” Hannah Abbott shyly asked Hermione, Harry and Neville. Annoyingly she would blush whenever she looked at Harry.

“Gran has set up some flying lessons for me,” Neville said a bit embarrassed. “I never got the hang of it after that first class. Oh, and she said I can start renovating Granddad’s old greenhouse,” Neville said while suddenly not making eye contact with anyone. “It kind of went into a state of disarray after he died, but Professor Sprout told Gran what talent I have with Herbology, so over the next few summers we’re going to restore it.

“Oh, that’s wonderful, Neville,” Hermione gushed, “You’re going to have to tell me more about it once you have the specifics made. I on the other hand don’t have too much stuff going on. Mum, Dad and I are going to take a small holiday to Spain at the beginning of the summer for about three weeks. After that I’m just going to study and read up for next year. I think my Pappy is coming for a week or so but it’s up in the air. His health has been rather frail lately. ”

“You’ll have to visit me and Lexi when you’re not too busy,” Harry commented. “You know she is just dying to see you again.”

“Lexi?” Lavender questioned, her face squished up in a look of confusion. “Who is Lexi? Is she your cousin or a muggle friend of yours?”

“Nah,” Harry said with a bitter laugh realizing once again the wizarding world didn’t seem to care about his not famous sister, but then again in his new friends defense he didn’t exactly flaunt Lexi around like a doll. “She’s my baby sister. We live together at my Aunt, Uncle and cousin Dudley.”

“You have a baby sister?” Ernie asked in complete shock. “Why haven’t we heard about her sooner?”

Hermione had made a loud tisking noise when Ernie asked his first question, “Don’t let Lexi hear you calling her Harry’s baby sister. Lexi

is just a little more than a year younger than us and she'll be coming to Hogwarts our third year."

"But that still doesn't explain why we never heard of her before," Susan Bones piped up. "There was never a mention of Harry having a sister in any of the books written about him and when he defeated Voldemort as a baby."

"I guess that goes to show you, you can't trust everything you read," Harry replied nonchalantly while Hermione wacked his arm for his jibe against books. "I don't know why no one knew about Lexi after my parents died. But I do know they kept her birth very secret and it was done through muggle means. So, that could be a factor in why no one really knows much about Lexi."

"But why haven't you said anything before," Lavender all but whined out.

"Do I know everything about your family?" Harry sharply asked. "I didn't think so," Harry continued since nobody replied. "I should be no different than anyone else. My personal life should not be made public because of something that happened to me a long time ago."

"Wow," Neville said changing the direction of the conversation. "She was born the muggle way but she was a witch?"

"I was born the muggle way," Hermione said with a frown gracing her features. "What's so wrong with that?"

"Oh, nothing," Neville quickly said to correct his mistake. "But it is unheard of for a witch or wizard born to magical parents to be born the muggle way. Honestly, she must be like the only one."

"I highly doubt that," Harry cut in, not liking the fact that his friend thought Lexi was unusual or different because of her birth. "There had to be other people hiding from Death Eaters that didn't trust St. Mungo's to be safe enough for their kids to be born in during the war."

"How do you know all this?" Lavender asked with wide-eye curiosity.

“A friend of my parents,” Harry replied looking at Hermione in hopes that she could change the subject.

“So, what did you think of Professor Snape’s potions practical?” Hermione immediately asked to the groans of all the first years around her.

~*~

After another hour of lounging around the lake, Harry, Hermione and Neville said their farewells and headed back to the castle to beat most of the dinner rush. Ernie, who had been suspiciously silent during the rest of the gathering, finally broke his silence after standing up to gain everyone’s attention.

“Alright, listen up ‘Puffs, and friends,” Ernie amended turning his attention to Lavender and Pavarti. “I think today we were given a chance of a life time, and I do not want to see anyone of us ruining this opportunity for everyone. Everything that was discussed here does not leave this place.”

“What do you mean, Ernie?” Susan asked genuinely confused.

“What I mean is that Harry Potter gave us an opportunity to become real, trusted friends of his and I intend to loyal to him,” Ernie replied. “Harry opened up to us and shared a bit of his life that no one really knows about. He did that freely with no strings attached. I do not want to see anyone betray that trust that Harry placed in us. Whether you are a ‘Puff or a Gryffindor, I hope you will all join me in protecting Harry’s privacy. That means, no one outside of this circle of friends will learn about Harry’s sister. It won’t be in the Prophet nor will there be any people from this school trying to write this little girl to learn more about Harry, alright?”

Everyone murmured their agreement and Ernie smiled considering everyone easily followed his plan.

“Good,” Ernie continued, “Now can someone share this with Neville as well? I don’t think we need to worry about Athena. It seems like she has known about this Lexi for a while now.”

~*~

“Lexi?” the disembodied voice of Sirius Black called through the dusty attic of number four, Privet Drive. It was a lot easier for Sirius to move through the Dursley household whenever he wanted now that he and Lexi had the invisibility cloak. “Are you in here?”

“Yes, Sirius,” Lexi replied from her spot behind a large box that hid the tiny girl’s frame. “I’m going through some of old things Aunt Petunia hid up here in the attic.”

Sirius almost snorted since he knew why the items had been placed in the attic. Most of the stuff he had found Lexi going through were either things from Petunia’s childhood or things that had been once owned by Petunia’s parents Dave and Rose Evans. Anything that could be in some way related back to memories of Lily or Petunia’s deceased parents were hidden up here to be lost to the dust. Unfortunately for Harry and Lexi it seemed that Petunia threw anything that was once Lily’s in the rubbish.

A small smile spread across his face when he saw Lexi so intent in her little project to understand her grandparents better, at that’s what Sirius thought her project was about. After the Christmas fiasco, the poor dear lost some of her sparkle, that spark that made her so lively and amazing. Sirius knew he couldn’t take sides in the squabble that had developed between Harry and Lexi. He was both of their godfather, so he was determined to be there for both of them. All that Sirius was glad for was that Harry and Lexi made up. He would have to get something very special for the Granger girl as a gift for helping the Potter children make up,

“Find anything interesting?” Sirius asked still hidden under the cloak. He tended to never take it off while he was in the house. He was concerned that the one time he did would be the one time a Dursley would be looking for Lexi and would find him. While he was a person

who loved to take risks, he felt being discovered was just one of those things that would be detrimental to his ability to take care of his godchildren.

“Just some old photos and cloths,” Lexi replied a bit too distractedly for Sirius’s taste. What he had to talk to the little girl about would require her full attention.

“Lexi, can you come over here for a minute?” Sirius began, hating how serious his tone sounded.

“What’s wrong, Sirius?” Lexi asked as she walked around the box looking around the attic as if she could determine his location while he wore the cloak.

“I just need to talk to you about something really important,” Sirius began trying to lighten his tone as he spoke. “You remember what I told you the goblins suggested I do before Christmas?”

“Yeah,” Lexi replied squishing her nose in concentration. “They wanted you to change your appearance so that you could walk around like a free man. Didn’t they want you to get plastic surgery or something like that?”

“ Yes, that was it exactly,” Sirius answered proud that his goddaughter was as sharp as a tack. “After long consideration and many heated discussions with Moony, you remember him, right?” Lexi nodded and Sirius went on, “I’ve decided that I won’t do anything as drastic or permanent as change my appearance in that manner.”

“Why not?” Lexi asked her confusion evident on her face. “Don’t you want us to live with you and to be able to go out in public?”

“Of course I do, Lexi,” Sirius replied with a sigh. “I’m just very leery about trusting the goblins, no matter how nice they were to you on your first visit to Gringotts. Having plastic surgery would completely change my appearance for ever. Moony and I did some research and I think I found a way to have the same effects that plastic surgery would cause without the permanent side-effect.”

“What do you plan to do?” Lexi asked eagerly.

“Well, pixie, I plan to have a charm cast on myself that is typically used for hiding an object-” Sirius began only to be cut off.

“But if you are hiding yourself then how can we go live with you eventually?” Lexi asked in one breath.

“Lexi,” Sirius began, while placing his hand on her shoulder to give her an indication of where his invisible form was and as a means to calm the young witch down. “You didn’t let me finish. The charm is used for hiding an object, not a person. For an example, a house could be hidden from all but those that know the secret. People could look right at it, but their eyes would either see a vacant lot or the buildings next to it.”

“Since I am a living, breathing person, I cannot be hidden by the Fidelius Charm,” Sirius continued. “We don’t think anything that can be classified as alive could be hidden with any variation of the charm. But instead, Moony and I tweaked the charm a bit and instead of hiding an object, we will be hiding a thing, more specifically my real identity.”

Lexi’s eyes lit up with comprehension. “So, if they were looking right at you, they would not know you were Sirius Black?”

“Even if I was standing right next to a wanted poster with my picture and name right on it,” Sirius replied with a nod. “They would look right at me and would accept any other name for me, other than Sirius Black. Although, Moony still thinks I may appear familiar to them, as if they had seen me before. It is largely experimental, but it’s the best option we have.”

“And if this doesn’t work?” Lexi asked. “Or perhaps you decide you want someone to know your real identity?”

“If it doesn’t work Moony and I will reassess all my options,” Sirius said with a frown on his face. He liked to think optimistically. If he

went into something believing it would work, he was more confident that it would. "Also, I will still need a key part of the original Fidelius Charm, a secret keeper to share the secret with those who need to know and to guard the secret in their heart to protect it from those who should not know."

"How will you know if it works?" Lexi curiously asked, yet another question.

"Well, I plan to walk into the Leaky Cauldron," Sirius replied a bit smugly. "If no one freaks out because I'm the wanted mass murderer, Sirius Black, then I'm good. If they do freak out, then I'll get out of there faster than you can say 'Marauder'."

Lexi giggled in response to the last part of Sirius's statement. "So, when do you plan to do this?"

"Right away," Sirius replied, glad that Lexi agreed to the plan without too much fuss. "I just need my secret keeper to come with me to Moony's place, where we'll cast the spell."

Lexi nodded her head in understanding, before Sirius sprung the last part on her.

"Alexa Potter, will you be my secret keeper?"

~*~

"Are you sure you're alright, Harry?" Hermione questioned for what had to be the thousandth time that evening.

"Yeah," Harry absentmindedly replied as he rubbed his livid scar. "I've just got a headache. Don't worry about it. I'll survive."

"I'm just concerned, Harry," Hermione replied with a frown. "I think your irritating your scar by constantly rubbing your head. Are you sure you won't go see Madam Pomfrey? Maybe she can give you something for the pain? I know it's nearly curfew but I'm sure we won't get in trouble if we're going to the Hospital wing."

“Positive,” Harry replied while giving Hermione what he thought was a reassuring smile. “I’ll just go up to my dorm room and lie down for a while. I’ll be fine by tomorrow morning?”

“Oh are you sure?” Hermione asked and she looked to be close to tears at this point. “I’m just so worried. It doesn’t seem like Legilimency is the cause of your headaches, there just isn’t anyone here in Gryffindor Tower that could be causing them. And since we don’t know what is causing them it makes me very worried about you, Harry.”

“I know, Hermione,” Harry said before pulling the bushy-haired witch into a one armed hug. “But you’ll see, everything will be fine by tomorrow morning.”

“I’ll go up with him, Hermione and make sure everything is alright,” Neville volunteered from behind the duo. Neither Harry nor Hermione had noticed him before. Neville just seemed to have a way of keeping himself unnoticed when he wanted to be hidden.

“That’s not necessary, mate,” Harry replied not very comfortable having someone babysit him even if it would make Hermione feel better.

“It’s nothing, Harry” Neville quickly replied. “I need to get something out of my trunk anyways. I’ll just go up with you and reassure, Athena, over there,” Neville continued in barely a whisper.

“Oh, thank you, Neville!” Hermione cried. Harry wondered what had his bushy-haired friend so worked up, but he let it go for the time being. It wouldn’t do to put her into more of a state at the present moment.

After Harry bid Hermione good night, both Gryffindor boys headed up to their dorm room, only to find a horrible surprise. Instead of the nice, clean, ordered room that they had left that morning what they found was an utter mess. Robes, shirts, socks, books and rolls of

parchment covered the floor. Almost instantly Harry recognized all of the items scattered around the room belong to him.

“Merlin, what happened in here?” Neville hissed as the door leading to the bathroom flew open.

“Harry!” Ron Weasley cried as he, Seamus and Dean rushed into the room. “Where is your invisibility cloak? We’ve got an emergency!”

Harry, and Neville, who had no knowledge of the cloak, looked dumbfound at the three boys in front of them.

~*~

For as long as Ron Weasley could remember he could recall his older brothers telling him the most amazing stories from their time at Hogwarts. Bill, his oldest brother, had a way of sharing stories that made them more of an adventure of a lifetime than simply a story from school.

So when Ron was finally old enough to go to Hogwarts, he was ready to have the adventure of a lifetime. And that adventure was off to a good start when the first person he met on the Hogwarts Express was a Muggleborn who was just as mystified and in a state of wonder of Hogwarts as he was. Well, that was until he found out the horrible truth about the boy, Harry that he met. He was Harry Bloody Potter, Hero of their world, and he played a horrible joke on Harry.

Being the butt of many of the twins’ jokes at home made Ron extra mad at Harry for taking advantage of him like that, and so he made it his personal mission to teach him an important lesson. You never cross a Weasley.

The first thing Ron did was make sure all of the first years knew exactly what kind of a prick Harry really was. Ron had thought Charlie and Percy were exaggerating exactly how effective the Hogwarts Gossip Mill was, but Ron could endorse full heartily that it was fast and efficient to get information spread around the school. It sure had helped having Granger back him, at the time.

Though somehow Potter got to Granger and now they were practically married or something, for crying out loud, they never left the other alone for more than ten minutes if possible or something.

Ron was thankful when the twins actually back him up on something. They usually were just around to take the mickey out of him. However, since the 'precious Harry Potter' got the 'no first years are allowed their own broomsticks' rule over turned since he was so bloody famous, the twins were all for taking Ron's lead. They began the best pranking campaign that Ron had been witness to since the Weasley Family Prank War of '89.

Then before Ron knew it, the Christmas holidays were upon them and Harry went home for the break. Since his mum, dad and Ginny went to Romania to visit Charlie, Ron and his brothers all had to stay at Hogwarts. During that break, Ron was the king of the dorm room. His bedroom at the Burrow while not shared with anyone else was extremely small and cramped. There was no one else to share the room with and he finally had a large area that he could consider his room and his room alone. Life was great and Ron highly doubted it could get any better than it was.

And that was where everything began to go downhill.

The day after Christmas, Ron noticed a strange looking package on Potter's bed. Since it wasn't his, he had no intentions of touching it; however, its mere presence in the dorm room seemed to call to him. It wasn't wrapped like a Christmas gift, since all he could see was brown paper coving the mystery object. The thing was just a mystery.

By the third day of constantly seeing the package, Ron did something incredibly stupid. He opened it to see what it was. And boy was he surprised when he found the object within the mystery package was a real, genuine invisibility cloak.

Ron knew right then he should rewrap the package and put the cloak back, never to think about it again. However, that wasn't what he did. Instead he decided that trying it out once wouldn't hurt anything. It wasn't like there were many people in the castle to catch him out of

bounds while he was testing the cloak out. So, he did that first night. And again the next night. And the next night...

Before Ron knew it, he was going out on nightly adventures with the invisibility cloak trying to find that adventure he was sure to have once he was a student at Hogwarts.

But not too much later, it was time for everyone to return from the break and Ron was well aware he had to return the cloak. But he didn't want to. The cloak was his way of having the great adventure at Hogwarts that he always knew he would have.

So he didn't return it right away. Instead he convinced himself he would return it later by putting it under Harry's bed, rewrapped and pretend like he had no idea how the cloak could have possibly gotten there. He needed to have his totally awesome adventure first.

Unfortunately for Ron, he never got the chance to test out whether his plan regarding the cloak would work since he got caught by none other than Headmaster Dumbledore one night when he was out of bounds. Ron had never been more embarrassed or ashamed of himself in his life. At first he blamed Harry for getting that stupid cloak, but Harry didn't make Ron take it. If McGonagall was right, then Harry had no knowledge of the cloak. This mess was all of his own making.

He was assigned nightly detentions with Hagrid, the Grounds Keeper, and he dutifully went to them, fulfilling his punishment. The hardest part was dealing with his brothers. He was lucky that Percy felt responsible for his behavior on one level, so he never wrote their mum and dad about Ron stealing the cloak. However, Percy acted like a complete prat to Ron and everyone else he came in contact with. And the twins, well, they had sort of bonded with Ron over Harry Potter, but now Ron was sleeping with one eye open, to try to anticipate their retaliatory prank on him.

Ron had royally messed everything up.

But the detentions were not so bad. Hagrid was a great bloke and not too many people knew what Ron had done, so he could keep that to himself. Malfoy may have constantly teased Ron for having to do

servant's work but really, it was better than Malfoy teasing him over the truth of the matter. Not to mention Seamus and Dean, the friends he had made in his dorm never knew what happened, so they were very supportive of him when Malfoy would try to start something.

One day while Ron was serving one of his detentions the greatest thing happened. Hagrid let it slip that he had a dragon egg. Ron had finally found something cool and secret that was going on at Hogwarts! Over the course of a few days, Ron, Seamus and Dean went to Hagrid's hut to watch over the egg. Then finally on day it hatched! It was so wicked!

They helped Hagrid take care of the thing over the course of two weeks, in which time Ron was bitten by the Norriwegin Ridgeback that Hagrid affectionately named Norbert. Then suddenly one day Norbert was gone. A teary-eyed Hagrid explained to the boys that Dumbledore learned of the dragon and had to send him away or Hagrid could possibly be sent to Azkaban. According to Hagrid it was amazing that the wardens overseeing the Dementors never learned of the dragon's existence.

So just like that, Ron's great Hogwarts adventure was over. Until Hagrid mentioned Fluffy...

Apparently Hagrid let Dumbledore borrow his three-headed dog so to help him protect something that was between Dumbledore and some guy named Nicholas Flamel. Ron, Seamus and Dean went and visited Fluffy trying to see the dog through the keyhole of the door. Unfortunately, they only got a quick glimpse of the dog before Potter and Granger showed up ruining everything.

But Ron quickly put that behind him as he tried to figure out exactly what Fluffy was protecting. After trying to find more about this Flamel guy in the library and coming up with nothing, Ron decided maybe it would be easier to ask that brain, Granger if she knew of him. Low and behold Granger came through with them. She had the biggest book in the world, and information about Nicholas Flamel was in it, along with the information about the Sorcerer's Stone.

For some reason Nicholas Flamel and Dumbledore were hiding the Sorcerer's Stone in Hogwarts. So, somebody must be looking for it. And that meant that Ron's great adventure was back on!

Ron and his friends had spent some time trying to figure out who was most likely to want to steal the stone, and the only person they could think would want to do that was Snape. So, when Snape let it slip that Dumbledore was gone earlier that day, they knew that he would be going for the stone that night. With Dumbledore gone, it was the perfect time for him to try to get the stone.

"Harry!" Ron rushed out of the bathroom after looking through Harry's bath supplies in search of the cloak. They hadn't been able to find it when they looked through all of Harry's belongings in the dorm room. "Where is your invisibility cloak? We've got an emergency!"

Harry and Neville stared blankly at Ron and his friends. Ron didn't have the time to deal with this! He had the school, no, the world to save.

"What?" Harry sputtered, "How do you know about the cloak?"

"Um, that's not important," Ron said as he could feel his face turn red. "But what is important is that the fate of the world is dependent on whether or not we can use your cloak."

Neville just stupidly stared at Ron, while Harry was studying him. Ron just hoped that Harry would just hand over the cloak already.

"I don't have the invisibility cloak," Harry replied and Ron couldn't believe Harry's audacity.

"There is no need to pretend, Harry," Ron said with as much patience as he could. "I know you have a cloak. I, um, saw it before."

"You're the one who had it," Harry rightfully accused.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Potter," Ron replied angrily.

“It doesn’t matter,” Harry said and it clear that he was angry as well. “I don’t know where you get off helping yourself to my belongings and disrespecting my personal space. But it doesn’t matter since I don’t have the cloak.”

“What?” Ron couldn’t believe his ears. While Harry did have a good point that Ron should have talked to him before looking for the cloak he had a good reason not to. Ron didn’t want Harry involved. This was supposed to be his adventure.

“I sent my cloak home,” Harry said making eye contact with Ron. “Why did you want it?”

“Doesn’t matter now,” Ron said grumpily. “Come on guys, we’ve got to do this by ourselves.”

With that Ron, Dean and Seamus stormed out of the dorm room. They had a stone to protect!

~*~

Lexi looked around the small home in wonder. Even though she had met Remus numerous times she had never been over to his home before. It was very nice in a simple laid back sort of way. The living room, the room that Sirius apparated her into, just had a simple couch and chair as the only pieces of furniture in the room. The walls were lined with different books and a glance at the titles showed that they were both muggle and magical. On the fireplace, the only other significant feature of the room, were magical pictures of a time long ago considering her parents were subjects in several of them.

It never occurred to Lexi that Remus Lupin lost his whole family, the same day she and Harry lost their parents. But by looking at the pictures on the wall it was clear that was the case.

“So, let’s do this,” Sirius said with a clap of his hands. He couldn’t fool Lexi. His nervousness was written all over his face.

“Are you sure this is what you want to do, Padfoot?” Remus asked with a very concerned look on his face.

“Of course, Moony,” Sirius said dismissively. “We talked about this several times and we both know that this is the best option.”

“Lexi,” Remus said, kneeling down in front of her to look her in the eye, “What Sirius has asked of you is a great burden for someone your age to take on. Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Yes,” Lexi said with her chin held up high. “I would do anything to help Sirius. Just tell me what I need to do.”

“Alright,” Remus said with a defeated tone of voice. “I guess this is the best way to do this anyway. I’ll cast the spell and Lexi will be the secret keeper.”

“What are we waiting for?” Sirius said with a giddy voice. “Let’s do this!”

~*~

Harry and Neville raced down the boy dormitory staircase after taking a few minutes to collect themselves and clean up a bit of the mess that the other boys made of Harry’s belongings. As soon as they reached the common room they came face to face with a frantic Hermione.

“What in the world is going on?” Hermione hissed at them. “The other boys just went running out of the common room. Percy was so furious that he left grumbling about going to see Professor McGonagall.”

“We don’t know exactly what they were up to,” Neville began turning to Harry. “For some reason they were looking through Harry’s stuff for something.”

Harry was thankful that his friend wanted to protect his privacy, but honestly, there was nothing to hide from Hermione.

“Weasley wanted the cloak,” Harry said and Hermione let out a hiss at his words. “We don’t know what for, but for some reason he did.”

“What could he be trying to do?” Neville asked.

“All Weasley said was that there was an emergency,” Harry replied to Neville.

“An emergency...” Hermione began before she trailed off. “Harry, do you think it might have something to do with when we saw them on the third floor corridor? Maybe it had something to do with that three-headed dog?”

“It’s possible,” Harry agreed. “But I don’t know what we could do.”

“Three-headed dog?” Neville squeaked out.

“Yes, it’s rather disconcerting to learn that we have a three-headed dog in this school, but fortunately it’s locked up,” Hermione distractedly replied. “Dear Merlin! You don’t think that they are going to go into the room with that monster, do you?”

“They might be,” Harry agreed. “We need to do something or that dog will kill them.”

“Are we sure that is where they are heading?” Neville asked curiously.

“As sure as we can be,” Hermione replied. “We really don’t have that much time if that locked room is where they are going.”

“We need to tell someone about this,” Harry began taking control of the situation. “Hermione, you need to go to a professor. Neville will come with me and we’ll try to stop them before they go into that room.”

After they decided their game plan, they made their way to the portrait hole they were stopped by a friendly face.

“Where do you three think you are going?” Audrey asked. “Curfew just passed.”

“Ron, Seamus and Dean are going to the third floor corridor,” Hermione blurted out before anyone could think of a response. “They are going to be eaten by that three-headed dog.”

Audrey’s eyes seemed like they were about to pop out of her head. “Three-headed dog?”

“Long story,” Harry jumped into the conversation. “We don’t have that much time.”

“Alright,” Audrey replied. “I need one of you to come with me to explain to Professor McGonagall what’s going on.”

“I’ll go,” Hermione volunteered keeping with the plan. “We must hurry.”

With that Hermione and Audrey flew through the portrait hole. Harry held Neville back with his arm.

“Let’s give them a minute before we leave ourselves,” Harry said. “We’re still sticking to the plan. Even with McGonagall they probably won’t make it to them in time.”

“How are we going to stop them?” Neville hesitantly asked.

“By any means necessary,” was Harry’s only reply.

~*~

“Is this really the best way to test this out?” Remus pleaded with Sirius as they stood outside the Leaky Cauldron. “There must be an easier way.”

He really hated the fact that Sirius was being so reckless. But Remus could understand how powerless Sirius felt since he was a wanted man. Sirius should have raised Harry and Lexi. He should have never been sent to Azkaban. They had all failed him.

“Sorry, Moony,” Sirius said patting his friend on the back. “You know there is no other way to do this. You didn’t readily recognize me until Lexi told me the secret. This is going to work.”

“Good luck, Padfoot,” Remus said giving his friend a manly hug.

“Don’t worry, Moony,” Sirius said with a smile. “Nothing is going to go wrong.”

With that Sirius walked into the Leaky Cauldron, while Remus waiting outside for the screams to begin.

~*~

Neville was definitely out of breath as he followed Harry through the halls of Hogwarts. With what he learned today it was safe to say Neville was suffering from an information overload. However, he had to admit it was thrilling to be a part of what ever this was.

“We’re nearly there,” Harry stated startling Neville out of his thoughts. “Damn it, the door is already open.”

“Are we going to enter the room?” Neville asked a bit worried about how safe it would be to do so.

“We’ll assess the situation when we get a better idea about what is going on,” Harry said as they thundered down the corridor.

Before Neville knew it they were in front of the open door. They slowed down as they approached the door, moving with caution, the approached the door way to find the most startling sight.

The three-headed dog was snoring loudly in the center of the room while an enchanted harp played a song. Seamus and Dean were

cowered in a corner while Ron Weasley was completely passed out in front of them. Professor Quirrell was attempting to fight off two Dementors but seemed to be worse from wear. He was pressed down to the ground and it seemed like the Dementors were moving in to injure him.

Harry moved to help Quirrell but suddenly Seamus spoke up.

“Harry, Quirrell’s trying to steal the Sorcerer’s Stone,” Seamus began to explain what was going on. “We thought it was Snape but he was the one that was trying to push his way past Fluffy.”

“Neville, go help Seamus and Dean get Ron out of here,” Harry commanded as he started to move toward Quirrell again.

“Harry, what do you plan to do?” Neville asked.

“I got to help Quirrell,” Harry explained. “Nobody deserves to be kissed by one of them.”

Not wanting to argue with Harry, Neville quickly rushed over to Seamus and Dean. The two boys each grabbed one of Ron’s arms as they started to pull him across the room. Neville had his wand out and was carefully watching everything around them. He wasn’t sure what he could do but he was going to give them cover should they need it.

“Urg,” Ron started to say he began to gain consciousness while they moved around the room. “This was not an amazing adventure. This just sucks.”

Neville tuned out the rest of Ron’s ramblings as he turned his attention to Harry. He was trying to move around the room without attracting the attention of the Dementors, which for some reason seemed to be working for him. Every few steps Harry seemed to struggle as he moved closer and closer to the Dementors and Quirrell. Suddenly, Neville remembered Harry’s reaction to the monsters during the first Quidditch match of the year. This was not going to end well.

“Potter,” a hiss came from Quirrell that certainly didn’t match his voice. “I’ve been waiting to see you.”

“Master, please,” Quirrell cried out. “I need all our concentration on the Dementors.”

“Fool,” the voice hissed out. “Show me to the boy. I need to see Potter with my own eyes.”

Using his wand free hand, Quirrell unwrapped the turban around his head to show the most revolting sight. On the back of his bald head was another face. Neville bit back the urge to vomit upon seeing the thing in front of him. Idly he heard the sounds of retching behind him and he knew one of the other boys couldn’t stomach this face.

“What’s the matter, Potter?” the face asked. “Don’t like your own handy work? You ripped me from my body all those years ago. Now I am forced to live off the energies and life forces of others.”

“Voldemort,” Harry said with such clarity and conviction that it made Neville shudder. The face was You-Know-Who, the Dark Lord...

“Master, no!” Quirrell screamed breaking the moment.

The silver mist that had acted as a buffer between Quirrell and the Dementors dissipated and the two Dementors surged forward. One approached Quirrell from the front, and the other attacked the face that was attached to the back of his head. As one, the two Dementors swooped forward and began what Neville believed was called ‘The Dementor’s Kiss’.

After a few moments the Dementors let go of the body and it fell to the floor, like a puppet with its strings cut. Then the Dementors moved towards Harry and Neville.

~*~

“Really, Miss Granger,” Professor McGonagall scolded as she raced through the halls. “You should have returned to Gryffindor Tower.”

Hermione, Professor McGonagall, Audrey and Percy Weasley were all racing towards the third-floor corridor. Somehow, Hermione was able to convince Professor McGonagall not to turn her away earlier. But with every step closer to the room with the three-headed dog, Hermione could tell that Professor McGonagall had changed her mind.

“Please, professor,” Audrey jumped in. “We’re nearly there.”

And they were. Hermione could see the open door, ahead of them. Ominously Ron, Seamus and Dean were all huddled on the floor in front of the door. Neville and Harry were out of sight. Suddenly a Dementor came out of the room and rushed towards the three boys.

“Expecto Patronum!” Professor McGonagall roared as a silver cat rushed out of her wand and rammed the Dementor sending it flying away from them.

Hermione sped up and ran faster than the others. She darted around the boys and ran into the room. She continued to run forward seeing Neville and Harry on the floor. From what Hermione could see, Neville was convulsing on the floor, which most likely meant he was still alive. But a second Dementor was swept over an unconscious Harry.

Not knowing what to do, but knowing if she did nothing her friend would likely die. Hermione rushed forward and tackled the Dementor, pushing it away from where it was sucking Harry’s forehead.

Suddenly everything felt cold to Hermione. So, cold and lonely, it was like she would never be happy again...

~*~

A/N: A huge thank you to everyone who reviewed. You guys are the reason I post weekly! :D A big round of applause goes to my betas

zephy, swanpride, and Yadlam. A big thanks to KarlSkywalker and nyladnam04 for all their words of encouragement.

Foria

Next Chapter: Consequences

Disclaimer: Roses are red, violets are blue. I don't own Harry Potter, so please don't sue!

Previously in Strength of Family...

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Chapter 21: Consequences

After waiting outside the pub for twenty minutes, Remus Lupin finally had enough. He had to go inside and see what happened to his friend. Remus knew he was supposed to wait for Sirius to come out, but seriously, it shouldn't take the man twenty minutes to come out.

Steadying his resolve, Remus walked in the door of the Leaky Cauldron and saw the most wonderful sight. Sirius, was sitting at the bar, drinking a butterbeer, talking with the bartender. Quickly glancing around the fairly crowded room Remus realized that it had worked. No one had recognized Sirius as the infamous mass murderer.

"Hey, Remus," Tom the barkeeper called out. "What will it be?"

Remus suddenly realized he had been standing around like an idiot for a few minutes, just observing everyone in this room.

"Just a butterbeer," Remus said quietly sitting down next to Sirius.

"You know Mr. Evans?" Tom asked indicating Sirius.

It seemed the old dog was beginning to spread the new identity they made for him. It really was ridiculously easy to forge muggle documents with a wand. They were going to pass Sirius off as a cousin of Lily Evans. That way Sirius could have a legitimate claim to take custody of Harry and Lexi. If Dumbledore would insist Harry be raised by a blood relative of Lily's, then they were going to invent one.

"Of course I know Edward," Remus said with a smile. "I was a good friend of Lily Evans at Hogwarts. We met a few times but I had no idea he was a wizard."

"Well, that's the weird thing," Sirius said with a smile. "My father was a wizard, but Lily's dad wasn't. So the family kept the magic secret from Uncle Dan, by just saying my dad had been accepted to a prodigious boarding. Then my dad moved to France, where he met my mum who was witch. I was born and sent to Beauxbatons, while low and behold cousin Lils is a witch that was sent to Hogwarts, and we never knew the other one was magical. I never knew she was a witch until I found out about what happened to her and James." By this point, Sirius's head bent over his drink in mourning for their lost friends.

"Such a loss to the wizarding world," Tom said with a shake of his head. "So, Edward, what do you do?"

"I used to work for a private firm," Sirius quickly replied and Remus was glad for the change in the direction of the conversation. "But now I'm thinking of starting my own business..."

Remus tuned out the rest of their prearranged answer as Sirius rambled on. For the love of Merlin, their insane idea had worked. Sirius Black was a free man, in everything but his true name.

Everything had felt so cold and lonely, like she would never be warm or happy again. It consistently felt colder until all of the sudden a flash of warmth and sunlight crossed her path. It reminded her of standing out in the cold, only to have the sun to suddenly shine upon her. It was amazing and incredible how fast the change happened but once it did Hermione slowly felt that she was changing the path of where she was heading. A bright light appeared before her and Hermione had no choice but to go towards it.

She was now on a hilltop in the most beautiful place she had ever seen. There were flowers everywhere she could see, except for in the middle of the hilltop where a beautiful woman was sitting as if she were waiting for her. She had long auburn hair, extremely fair skin that looked radiant next to her silver and gold gown and the most amazing emerald green eyes.

"Come here, Hermione," the woman's musical voice called to her. "Come and join me; we have a lot to talk about."

"Who are you?" Hermione asked the beautiful woman as she sat down in front of the woman in the place she indicated.

"I'm Lily," the woman replied as she took Hermione's hands in her own. "I think you know my children rather well."

"Yes, Misses Potter," Hermione responded as her mind tried to process what was going on around her. "Am I dead?"

"No, dear," Lily said as she moved Hermione's hair out of her eyes. "You're not dead and please call me Lily."

"I'm sorry," Hermione said as her cheeks blushed red. "I don't mean to be rude, but why are you here and where are we for that matter?"

"We're in the in-between," Lily said as she retook Hermione's hands, "as for why am I here... well James and I thought it would be better

for someone to meet you while you were here and try to explain things to you."

"Why would you care about me?" Hermione asked unable to stop herself before she did.

"Hermione," Lily began with a tone of disapproval in her voice, "you're like a sister to my son and daughter. James and I are so grateful for everything you've done for them. We're always watching over them, and we're watching over you as well. You're family. Now we need to talk about other things, we don't have a lot of time..."

If a person were to enter the Headmaster's office this evening, they would get the shock of their life. While many people regarded Albus Dumbledore as the most powerful wizard in the world, few actually thought about what that actually meant. When they looked at Dumbledore with his friendly grandfather like visage they forgot that this was the man that defeated Grindelwald and was the only wizard that Voldemort ever feared.

But on this night, anyone who crossed Albus Dumbledore's path would know why he was so revered by wizard kind yet feared in the next moment.

An aura of power surrounded the elderly man as he paced back and forth in his office. Most magical auras regularly went unseen. However, due to the extreme emotions the wizard in question was experiencing, his magical aura was a visible, tangible part of him.

Just hours earlier everything had been going according to Albus's plan, and it was very likely to succeed in drawing out Voldemort. He knew that something had been attacking the unicorns in the forbidden forest and it was a reasonable jump to assume that the thing was Voldemort, considering how only something dark and twisted would kill an innocent such as a unicorn and drink its blood.

Earlier in the evening, Albus had no reason to suspect that anything bad was likely to happen. When he received an urgent owl from the Minister, claiming to need Albus's assistance immediately, he was almost relieved that the Minister was turning to him for advice again.

It would be horrible if the Minister For Magic became a mouth piece for Lucius Malfoy and his cronies.

Instead of flooing to the ministry from his office, Albus had gone by broom. It had been long time since he had nice relaxing broom ride, and the time it took to reach the ministry would be good for Fudge to wait. It would be a nice reminder to the minister that Albus Dumbledore was a very busy man. However, once Albus reached the ministry it was quite obvious that he had not been requested to come. Feeling a bit like a fool, Albus immediately turned around and headed back to Hogwarts. Instead of flying back to school by broomstick, Albus apparated to the gates of the school and rushed to the main hall, to find out if Voldemort had made his move.

Sadly Voldemort had made an attempt to steal the Sorcerer's Stone and nothing had gone according to Albus's well crafted plans. Instead of young Harry Potter and his friends valiantly protecting the stone from the clutches of evil, three other first year boys attempted to stop Voldemort, which nearly resulted in the boys' death. Harry Potter did respond to the emergency but he was merely there to stop the three other Gryffindor boys from doing something stupid.

Instead of an epic showdown between the spirit of Voldemort and young Harry Potter, two Dementors had crashed the battle and stole the soul of Professor Quirrel which caused Voldemort to flee the castle. Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom, the other child the prophecy could have been about nearly had their souls stolen as well if it wasn't for the actions of Hermione Granger and Minerva McGonagall. Minerva had driven the Dementors off with the Patronus charm while Miss Granger did a rather muggle thing and tackled the beast to prevent it from stealing her friends' souls.

Unfortunately, no one has ever had bodily contact with a Dementor and lived to tell the tale. The poor muggleborn first year was likely to never wake up despite Madam Pomfrey's best efforts. He was still trying to think of the best way to tell her muggle parents that she would never wake up. It was for the greater good but somehow he wasn't sure two muggles would understand the importance of the Boy-Who-Lived and why it was so necessary that he continued to live instead of their daughter.

The floo roared breaking Albus from his thoughts. He would have to revisit them later but for now it was time to show Cornelius Fudge exactly why he, Albus Pervical Wolfgang Brian Dumbledore could be the Minister For Magic if he should desire.

"Dumbledore!" Cornelius squeaked as soon as he entered the room. He was followed by Madam Umbridge and two aurors. "What has happened? I was told there was a problem with the Dementors."

"Yes, Minister," Albus said in a voice dripping with anger and power, "there has most definitely been a 'problem' with the Dementors. Two of them broke into my school and attacked students."

"No, they wouldn't have," Cornelius attempted to argue.

"One of the students happened to be Harry Potter," Albus continued ignoring Fudge and Umbridge's gasps of dismay. "Those beasts are to be removed from my school within two hours or I will go to the Daily Prophet with this information."

"Hum hum," Madam Umbridge interrupted, and Albus sorely wished that he remembered the woman's first name. "Now Dumbledore, there is no need to do that but I think there is a larger question here we need to answer."

"And that would be?" Albus asked daring the woman to challenge his word. He was not ready to tell the world that Voldemort was still around. There were too many free Death Eaters that could take that information to heart and restart their old practices even if Voldemort didn't have a body. Or worse, there would be Death Eaters seeking out his spirit to find a suitable host for him to inhabit.

"Why would the Dementors enter the school?" Umbridge asked in what she must have thought was a sweet tone. "Something must have drawn them to the building. Did Sirius Black attempt to abduct the Potter boy and the Dementors were merely there to save the day?"

"I'm sorry, Madam Umbridge, but the Dementors were not heroically defending young Harry Potter," Dumbledore replied as he studied the woman over the brim of his glasses. "They attempted to steal the boy's soul. If Deputy Headmistress McGonagall had not stepped in when she did, there would have been more than one person kissed this evening."

"Were the Dementors responding to something to the ward set for the third floor corridor?" Fudge asked and Albus was nearly ready to bang his head on his desk. He really never thought Fudge would remember the ward they put up around the room with the trapdoor. But apparently the Minister wasn't as dim as he was counting on.

"Yes, there was a disturbance there," Albus admitted. "But first year students fell victim to the Dementors, not any criminals."

"What was Potter doing there?" Umbridge asked with a shrewd look on her face. "It was the boy's fault for being out of bounds."

"Harry Potter was attempting to do something noble," Albus serenely replied. "He was attempting to prevent other students from entering the room. Instead, he was too late but prevented them from being kissed by the Dementors by bringing their attention to himself."

"Are we completely sure there were no entities that were not supposed to be in Hogwarts in that room?" Umbridge asked much to Albus's surprise.

"Not to my knowledge," Albus replied, curious as to where this was going. "Why do you ask?"

"Are you sure there were no goblins in there?" Umbridge pestered only to have both of the aurors groan in response.

"Delores," Cornelius said while shaking his head, "the goblins are not out get us. If Dumbledore says there were no goblins, then there were no goblins. If your obsession with goblins were to get out I'd be ruined. We're going to have a very long talk once we get back to the office about your position in my administration." With those words Fudge stood up and walked towards the floo.

"Minister," Albus called out before Fudge got too close to the fireplace. "About those Dementors?"

"I can't recall them," Fudge replied with a frown. "Sirius Black is still on the loose and what about the thingy?"

"But he has never made an attempt to enter my school," Albus countered. "There have been zero legitimate sightings of Sirius Black since his escape and I do say for all we know he could be dead or in a country with no extradition treaties with Great Britain. As for the 'thingy' as you called it, the term is over so it will no longer be housed in the school."

Cornelius looked rather conflicted for several minutes before he finally settled on a decision. "Alright, the Dementors will be recalled since the thingy is gone," the Minister said. "But if Sirius Black attacks the school it will be on your head, Dumbledore."

As the ministry contingent left his office, Albus pulled out a lemon drop and began to suck on it. All things considered everything worked out for the best for him. The Dementors were gone, and Voldemort had been driven from the school. So why did he have a feeling that the other shoe had yet to drop?

It was dark and cold, where ever he was. There was nothing around him to mark or signify that he was anywhere at all. The last thing he remember seeing was Dementor come closer, after it dropped Professor Quirrell. One minute he was in the room with the three-headed dog, the next he was here.

Was he dead? It sure looked like the Dementor had killed Quirrell and Voldemort, if that thing in the back of Quirrell's head really was Voldemort.

"What in the world would possess Miss Granger to do something like that?" a distant voice whispered. The person the voice belonged to was too far away to recognize who it belonged to.

"She's lucky she is still alive," a different murmured in agreement.

What had happened to Hermione? What were the voices talking about? But there were no answers to Harry's questions just the lingering silence.

Suddenly a bright light appeared far off in the distance. But the bright light made it easier for Harry to make sense of his surroundings. There was mist everywhere but since he had been in this location three times before, he had a rather good idea of where he was. Harry was standing at King's Cross Station and he was completely butt naked. After wishing extremely hard that he was not in his current state of undress Harry realized clothing had magically appeared on his body. That was rather fortunate for him.

"Hello, Harry," a soft female voice that seemed vaguely familiar called out of the mist.

"Who's there?" Harry called out as he turned around in circles looking for the voice.

"We are, son," a male voice that Harry knew he had heard before called out. "We're here like we've always been."

As soon as those words were spoken the mist cleared away and Harry was able to see the people who spoke to him. There was a man who shared the same messy black hair, strong chin and need for glasses as he did. Next to the man was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She had long red hair like Lexi once had and she had bright emerald green eyes that matched both of the Potter siblings.

"Mum? Dad?" Harry asked unsure if he was willing to know the truth on whether or not these people were truly his parents.

"Yes, sweetheart," his mother replied as she walked towards him and wrapped him in her arms.

Hot tears began to stream down Harry's face as he was held by his mother. He had never been held in such a loving manner before in his life and he rather enjoyed in. With such a simple gesture Harry knew beyond a shadow of doubt that his mother had loved him with

all of her heart. Living with the Dursleys, Harry had truly wondered whether or not his parents would love him had they lived. In this single moment all that doubt had been washed away. He was wanted and he was loved.

"Oh, my darling, I am so sorry we can't be there with you and Lexi," his mother whispered into his ear as she still held on to him with all that she was worth. "We did what we needed to protect you and your sister. I can't believe they thought Sirius was at fault for our deaths and I am more than appalled that he never got a trial. He is a good man and you should trust him to do the best thing for you and Lexi; your father and I do."

"You have a choice here," Lily continued in a louder voice as she pulled herself away from Harry. "You can either stay with us, or you can go back to the realm of the living and be with Lexi and your friends. You are currently in the in-between."

Harry took a few minutes to think about what his mother said. While staying with his parents was really appealing it would mean that he would have to leave Lexi and Hermione behind. That was the last thing in the world that he wanted to do. He knew his sisters by blood and choice would be beyond heartbroken if he died. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that there really wasn't a decision to make.

"I'm going to go back," Harry said bracing himself for the disappointment he was sure his parents would show. But surprisingly for Harry, it never came.

"Darling, we knew there was no real choice," his mother said much to his surprise. "We knew you'd never intentionally leave Lexi to fend for herself. You are such a good brother to your sister and we are so proud of the both of you. In a situation that would have destroyed other people, both of you both flourished and turned in to strong individuals. While we wish your circumstances were different, it doesn't change the fact that we still love you and your sister for who you both are."

Suddenly Harry felt a weight on his shoulder, as he turned around he saw his father standing behind him with one of his hands on Harry's shoulder. He had a very sad expression on his face that looked really out of character on the older man. His father looked like he should be carefree but the seriousness of whatever he had to say seemed to weigh him down.

"Harry, I need you to do me a favor," his father began, "I need you to tell Sirius and Remus something very important for us. Can you deliver a message for me?"

"Of course," Harry readily agreed. He'd do anything for his parents.

"Tell them both we don't blame them, either of them," James stressed the last part. "Both of them have been living with the guilt of our deaths and feel that if we could, we would blame them for various reasons. The truth is we don't blame them in the slightest. Just tell them it wasn't their fault and that they are not the last two living Marauders. Tell them I don't mean Peter, but I'm referring to you, Lexi and Hermione." After seeing Harry's questioning look, James just shook his head. "The Marauders were more than friends. We were family. They will explain the rest to you."

"Hermione!" Harry exclaimed, unable to believe he forgot all about his friend. "She's hurt, I have to help her."

"There is nothing you can do," Lily said as she ran a hand through Harry's hair. "Hermione will be alright, we've already seen her and we will see her again before she wakes up. She was really hurt Harry, but it was her decision to do what she did. Don't criticize her for what she did, since she didn't use magic. If she didn't do it, the Dementor would have eaten your soul after it was finished with the remains of your scar. She saved your soul so you would have the chance to live."

"What did she do?" Harry asked truly wondering what his bushy haired friend could have done to stop a Dementor.

"She was utterly brilliant! That Hermione tackled the Dementor like she was a player in a rugby game," his father replied with clear glee

on his face. "It was beautiful and it sure did take McGonagall by surprise. Someone should give her a medal for shocking McGonagall, let alone for how she stopped the Dementor attack."

A strangled cry could be heard from some hidden point in the mist that drew the attention of all three Potters. Harry made to take a step towards where he heard the cry, but both his mother and his father held him back.

"Don't worry about that," Lily said as her arms wrapped completely around Harry so she was once again holding him tightly in her embrace. "Your father and I are going to take care of that thing."

"What was that?" Harry asked still oddly drawn toward the noise.

"It's Voldemort, son," James replied. "It's just a small sliver of his soul. He made objects to tie himself to the realm of the living. That is how he survived the killing curse that rebounded back on him. What is over there is just a piece of his soul that came here after the Dementor sucked it out of your scar. Now don't be alarmed by that, it had no effect on you, it was just a side effect of that rebounded killing curse. Your mother and I will dispose of it but you and your sister need to be careful because he is still out there and he will be after you."

"But shouldn't he be dead now?" Harry asked. "His soul was sucked out of the back of Quirrell's head. Shouldn't that be the end of it?"

"No, Harry," Lily tearfully replied. "The only thing that came to the in between was the piece from your scar. I have no idea as to what happened to the first one. He will still want you for what you did to him," his mother continued before he had a chance to ask a question. "Voldemort will not understand what I did to protect you, and he will assume you know. He will want you for that information, and he will want you dead for being the downfall to his reign of terror."

"What did you do to protect me?" Harry asked, truly curious to know the answer.

"I performed a very complex piece of magic," Lily vaguely answered, as she tried to wave off the answer. "I won't tell you any more since knowing will put you in danger."

"But if I knew what spell it was, others could be protected as well," Harry protested. "I need it to protect Lexi and Hermione."

"Casting the charm comes with a very serious consequence," Lily said with a frown. "If I had known at the time, we would have done something else to save you. Please just drop this matter and be thankful for what you have. And whatever you do, don't listen to Dumbledore. He somehow got it in his head that love alone saved you. That is a bunch of bull and I would highly recommend that you suggest he is senile and needs to be placed in a nursing home."

"Just remember what we've told you," James said as he messed up Harry's hair. "It's about time for you to go back. Tell your sister we love her and pass on my message for Sirius and Remus. Oh, and their plans are solid and you would do well by following them."

"Drat, I almost forgot," Lily said as she let go of Harry. "There is a girl you will meet in the next few years. I'm not sure exactly when since you nearly met her already, but the important thing is she can see things more clearly than most. You would do well to have her as a friend. Most people will find her odd, but I assure you she will be one of the most loyal friends you will have and can help you find the way when others can't."

"Um, alright," Harry replied a bit puzzled by his mother's last warning. "Anything else I need to know?"

"Yeah," his dad said with a grin. "Let loose and have a little fun while you are at Hogwarts. You're only young once and it would be a shame if you spent your youth being too serious. Even your mother, the most serious student Hogwarts ever knew besides possibly that Granger girl, enjoyed pulling a good prank every once in a while. Enjoy life while you can and always remember that we love you, we are proud of you and we will always watch over you and the people you love."

Harry jumped up and nearly out of the hospital bed. Professor McGonagall, who was sitting on a chair perched next to his bed gasped, in surprise. His parents were gone as was the mist covered Kings Cross Station. Instead, he was in the Hogwarts infirmary.

"Mr. Potter," Professor McGonagall called out, "How are you feeling? Is there anything wrong?"

"No," Harry's raspy voice replied. "What happened Professor? What am I doing in the hospital wing?"

"About that, Potter, what were you doing the Forbidden corridor?" Professor McGonagall said with a shrewd look.

"What?" Harry asked numbly.

"I said Mister Potter, what were you doing in the Forbidden Corridor?" Professor McGonagall repeated.

"I was there to stop Ron, Dean and Seamus from doing something really stupid," Harry replied trying to answer Professor McGonagall's question without ratting out his fellow Gryffindors. "Unfortunately Voldemort and some Dementors got there first. The Dementors ate Quirrel's soul and one of the Dementors attempted to kiss me, but instead was drawn to my scar. It did something to it, and after that I knew no more."

After Harry finished his rant, he once again made eye contact with his head of house. Instead of her usual stern expression, she looked shocked and as white as any of the ghosts that reside in the castle. Perhaps he had shared with her more information than she had desired? Not like he could do anything about it at this point.

"Are you serious, Mister Potter?" Professor McGonagall asked in a voice barely above a whisper.

"Yes, Professor," Harry politely replied.

"You will have to excuse me Mister Potter, but I must speak to the Headmaster at once," McGonagall said faster than you could say 'transfiguration' the professor was out of the hospital wing doors.

Harry stared in shock at the place where his head of house had previously sat. Apparently his information was more important than his wellbeing. Looking around the hospital wing he could easily see Ron and his friends across the room. They looked a little worn out but otherwise unharmed.

Neville sat to one side of Harry, while Hermione was at his other. Neville was awake but was currently speaking in quiet tones to Madam Pomfrey so Harry was confident that his one friend was fine. It was Hermione that concerned him.

His mother said that they had spoken to his bushy haired friend before they spoke to him, yet she was still unconscious. Her appearance alone was rather disheartening. She looked so pale in the harsh lights of the hospital wing and she looked as if she was slightly trembling every so often. It was her hair that had him most concern. Instead of her bushy brown hair that he had been accustomed to, her hair was completely straight, streaked with pure white strands of hair among her normal brown. Harry didn't know what could make her hair change in such a drastic way, but whatever it was couldn't be good.

Harry stared at Hermione from his seat in a chair by her bedside. He was hoping against hope that he could simply will her awake. Professor McGonagall had returned with the Headmaster to speak with Harry what happened but he had refused to say anything more. For some reason he didn't want to share his experience with his mother and father with the two professors. He was still rather miffed at his Head of House for taking off like she did and according to his mother, the Headmaster was senile. Nothing would be gained by speaking with them at this current moment.

Professor McGonagall had attempted to force Harry back to Gryffindor tower since he was awake and seemed quite well. But thankfully Madam Pomfrey wouldn't have it. She was quite insistent that Harry should at least spend a night in the hospital wing. However,

the kindly matron did not force him to remain in a bed. She allowed him to keep his vigil at Hermione's bedside.

"A lot of people tease Hermione saying she should have been sorted in to Ravenclaw," Neville said taking Harry by surprise. He knew the other boy was in the Hospital Wing as well but he was still taken by surprise when the other boy spoke up. "I dare any one to challenge Hermione's right to be in Gryffindor. I'd be the first person to curse them into oblivion for suggesting it. She has to be one of the bravest people in all of Gryffindor."

"She is the bravest Gryffindor," Harry easily agreed. "When you get out of the hospital wing, I want you to spread that around Gryffindor Tower."

"What about you, Harry?" Neville asked.

"I'm going to stay here till she wakes up," Harry said with a small smile on his face. "Hermione is like family to me, and I know her parents can't come see her at Hogwarts because they are muggles. So I'll be here with her in their stead."

"Can I visit her too?" Neville questioned. "Hermione is important to me as well."

"Of course," Harry said with another grin for his roommate. "Anyone can visit Hermione if they wish, but everyone in Gryffindor should know that she saved my life. I just need you to pass on that word for me."

"She didn't just save your life, Harry," Neville said with a fire burning behind his eyes. "I was right next to you mate. She saved my life as well. Should this just stay in Gryffindor or should the other houses know as well?"

"What to do mean?" Harry asked a bit puzzled by the other boy's words.

"Well, we can either make this information strictly in house or we can make it public knowledge that will eventually spread throughout all of

Hogwarts," Neville explained. "I personally think the other members of the study group should be allowed to know what a hero Hermione is."

"Agreed," Harry replied. "Do what you need to do to make it happen."

Both boys were quiet for several minutes as they kept their vigil over Hermione. While Harry was lost in his silent contemplation he realized that Neville Longbottom had stood by his and Hermione's side through many different things throughout the year. While Harry may have never exactly thought of things in exact terms, it was safe to say that Neville Longbottom was his friend and was definitely someone he could trust and rely on. All things considered the other boy was willing to stand toe to toe against a Dementor with him. If there was someone else at Hogwarts Harry could trust, it was Neville.

Making a split second decision, Harry spoke again and perhaps changed the fate of his fellow Gryffindor.

"Neville, something happened when the Dementor tried to kiss me," Harry began while carefully observing the other boy. "When Hermione wakes up, I want to tell both of you all about it. But this needs to be kept just between us."

"Sure thing, Harry," Neville instantly replied. "You can count on me."

Madam Pomfrey seemed to be at her wits end the next afternoon. True to his word, Neville spread the information around Gryffindor Tower, and to their study group, after he was released in the morning. In response, the hospital wing seemed to be the most popular place in the entire castle that afternoon. It seemed as though every student in Gryffindor and every member of their study group had come to visit Hermione that afternoon, yet she hadn't woken up. The matron in charge of the hospital wing had allowed each person to visit Harry and the unconscious Hermione for a minute before she forcefully ejected them from the hospital wing.

Harry hadn't moved from her side, and thankfully Madam Pomfrey didn't make him either. Nobody had questioned why Harry had to stay in the healer's care since he seemed to be fine despite his near death

encounter the night before. When Professor McGonagall had raised a question to Harry's presence, Madam Pomfrey had promptly replied he was staying there for further observation. Which left Oliver Wood, who had overheard the exchange, to remind Harry that their final game of the season was in two days and that Gryffindor would lose badly without him there and playing at his best. Not to pressure him or anything.

"She really is like Athena," Tracey Davis said when she and her friend Daphne Greengrass had dropped by,

"What do you mean?" Neville asked before Harry had the chance to do so himself.

"Well, Athena wasn't just the goddess of wisdom in all the greek myths," the girl replied with a small smirk on her face. "She was also depicted as the goddess of honorable war. Hermione definitely lives up to the nickname of Athena."

"Voldemort was there," Harry said in barely more than a whisper but it was more than loud enough for both girls to hear. "He's gone for now but he will be back."

"Are you trying to scare us, Harry?" Daphne asked, "Because it's really awful thing to do if you are."

"I just wanted you girls to be aware," Harry replied.

"Because we're Slytherins and Voldemort and his Death Eaters were as well?" Tracey asked with a strange look on her face.

"Not entirely," Harry truthfully responded. "Tracy, you're one of the few people that are brave enough to call him Voldemort instead of You-Know-Who. I personally know his followers come from all of the houses, including Gryffindor. But since you're in Slytherin who is defiant enough to call him by his name, I thought you should be as aware of the true situation as we are."

"How do you know this?" Daphne all but hissed in a low voice.

"Because we had the distinct privilege of meeting him face to face in the forbidden third floor corridor where he was trying to steal the Sorcerer's Stone," Neville jumped into the conversation from the other side of Hermione's hospital bed. Madam Pomfrey may have released the other boy, but that didn't mean she was going to restrict his visiting time as she had the majority of the student population. "Since the encounter with Voldemort happened at school and he was a Slytherin just as the two of you are, I can see why Harry thinks it is important for the two of you to know.

"Thank you for the warning," Tracey finally replied after intently staring at the two Gryffindor boys for what felt like an eternity to the two of them. "I will take it under advisement. Should we assume that we should keep this information to ourselves?"

"For right now that would probably be for the best," Harry responded thankful that they were at least taking him seriously.

The conversation after that point lead to happier topics.

On that day of final Quidditch match of the year, Hermione had yet to wake up, Harry was all set to forget playing in order to stay by Hermione's side. However, Neville and the Gryffindor Chasers would not let Harry sit the last game out.

"You don't understand, Harry," Angelina Johnson began, "this is more than just a game to the most of us. I know Oliver and a few other members of the team are hoping to go pro eventually. Every team win makes us look better for potential scouts!"

"Oliver is in fifth year," Harry countered, "He's got two whole seasons before he need to worry about going pro and anyone else has even more years than that before they graduate."

Angelina nearly jumped across the hospital bed Hermione was occupying in her attempt to strangle the younger seeker. Luckily for Harry and the unaware Hermione, Neville and the other two Chasers were able to keep her from launching herself at Harry.

"Harry, this is only your first year," Katie Bell, the second youngest player on the team began, "but we're the youngest team in the school. All the other houses had so much more experienced teams than ours. The fact that we are one snitch away from winning the house cup is like a miracle. It might not seem like a big deal to you but to the rest of us, and the rest of the house, this is the world."

"Gryffindor never has a shot at the House cup especially with Professor Snape taking points off all of us all for merely existing," Alicia continued. "The cup we value and love is the Quidditch cup. You can't take that away from us, Harry! We need you to win."

"Besides, I heard Oliver Wood was attempting to drown himself in the shower this morning when he realized you were still with Hermione," Neville said a sad tone to his voice. "If it weren't for Fred and George pulling him out, I don't even want to think about what would have happened."

"Please, Harry, we need you!" Angelina pleaded with tears sparkling in her eyes. In that moment, Harry Potter knew somehow, some way he would be doing as she wanted. He hated to see girls cry.

In the end, a compromise was met when Neville agreed to sit with Hermione while Harry was at the game. Gryffindor won, securing the Quidditch cup for the first time since Charlie Weasley was seeker. As it turned out, Charlie Weasley only left Hogwarts a year before Harry entered. When he asked what the big deal was if they only lost it one year, Oliver Wood gave him a strange look and told him, 'one year is one year too many with the Quidditch cup out of Gryffindor control.'

A/N: Hello, um long time no see? *Ducks rotten veggies* Well my New Year's resolution is to post this story at least once a month. If I can, I will post more frequently than that. As to why it took so long to post this, um, life, the death of a laptop with the only copy of this on it, and then not being happy with my attempt to rewrite it. I still think this isn't perfect but it's as good as it's going to get without the use of a time turner to resave the original copy to a storage drive before the loss of my laptop, that I had affectionately named George. My currently laptop (named Anko) is pretty sweet.

A big thank you to zephy and Yadlam-sama for their awesome beta work, without them all of the readers would be subjected to my horrible spelling... That is sometimes considered a fate worse than death. If anyone is interested in being a beta for me (since both zephy and Yadlam-sama are frequently as busy as I am with other things) please let me know.

Foria

Chp22